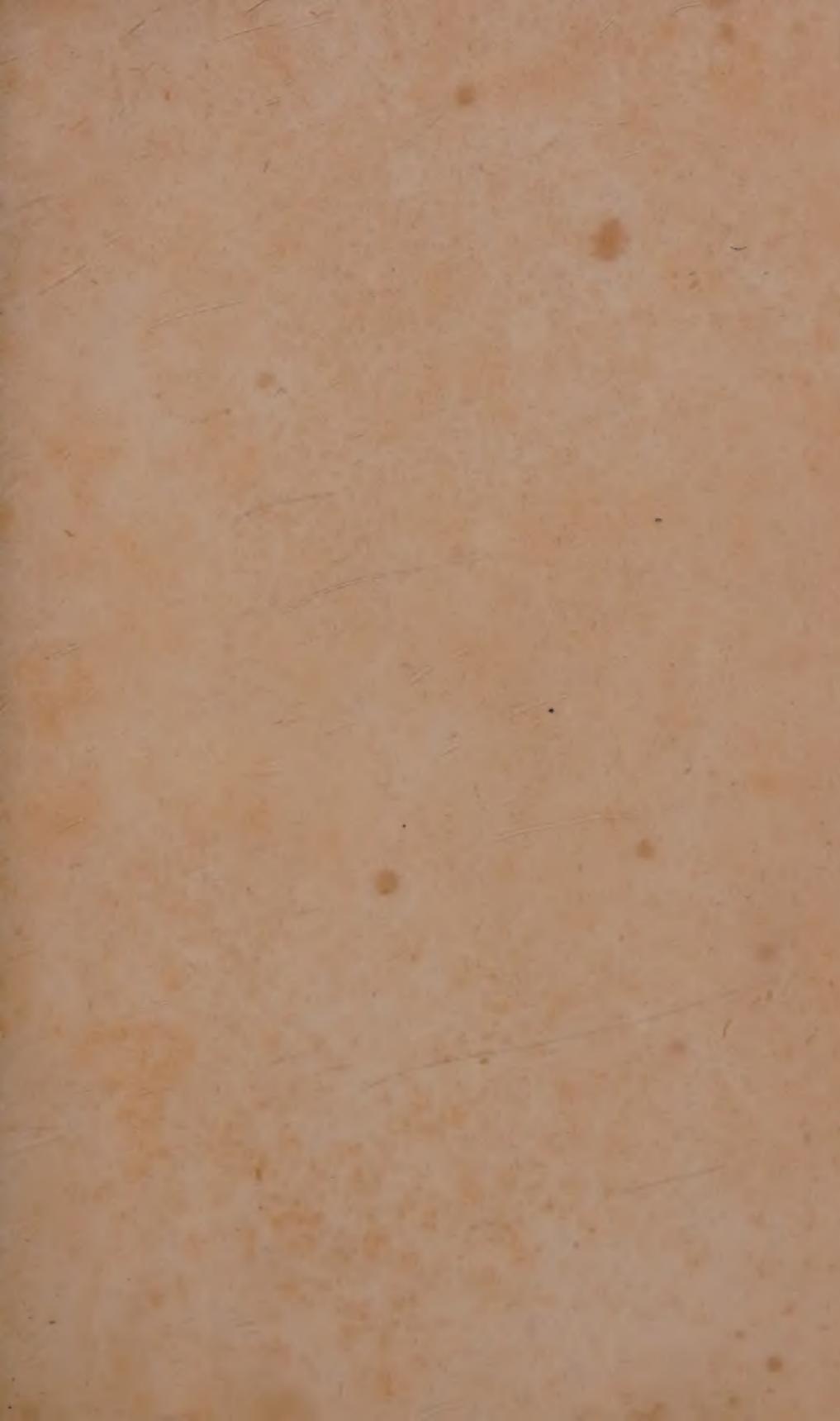


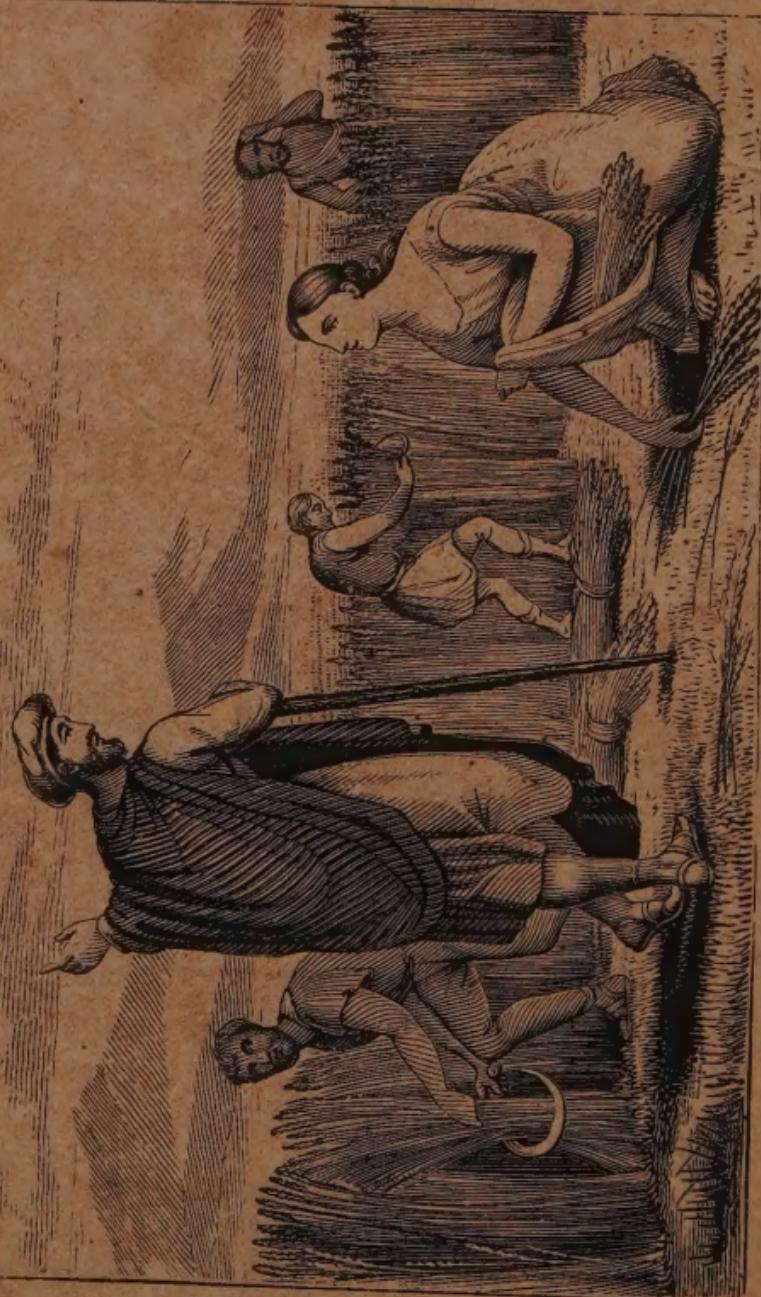
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RUTH GLEANING.



SCRIPTURE BIOGRAPHY

FOR THE YOUNG,

WITH

CRITICAL ILLUSTRATIONS

AND

PRACTICAL REMARKS.

.....
RUTH.
.....

BY REV. T. H. GALLAUDET.

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RUTH.

CHAPTER I.

A famine in Israel. Elimelech and his family go to Moab. He dies. His sons marry there, and die also.

Bethlehem, in the tribe of Judah, was six miles south of Jerusalem on the way to Hebron. It stood on a high hill, overlooking a valley that stretched from west to east, as far as the Dead Sea, of which it commanded a distinct prospect. Its name is a Hebrew word which signifies *the House of Bread*; and it was also called Ephratah, or *the fruitful*. We may infer from this that it was in the midst of a rich and productive country, and distinguished for the abundance which it enjoyed of all the necessaries and comforts of life.

But during a famine which prevailed throughout the land in the time of the judges, (though of which one it seems impossible to determine,) this favored place suffered its share of the com-

mon calamity. The distress was great. Its inhabitants resorted to various expedients for relief. Some sought it in distant places where plenty yet abounded. Among these was a man by the name of Elimelech, who, with his wife Naomi, and two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, went as far as the country of the Moabites, and there fixed their abode. This people dwelt on the east of the Jordan, adjacent to the Dead Sea, and on both sides of the river Arnon, which empties into it towards its northern extremity. Their land was exceedingly pleasant and fertile, and doubtless, at this time, furnished the emigrating Bethlehemite and his family a happy deliverance from the sufferings which they had so lately endured.

What the rank of Elimelech was, or his particular condition, we have not the means of ascertaining. He was, probably, a man of some respectability and influence. He owned "a parcel of land" in Bethlehem, as will appear in the sequel, and must have been able to command some of the means which were necessary for taking so long a journey.

In the dearth of other particulars, it may not be uninteresting to mention that his name signifies *my God a king*, or *God is my king*; that of his wife, *my amiable, or pleasant one*, (a very appropriate epithet, and descriptive of her true character;) while Mahlon and Chilion, the names

of his two sons, may be rendered, *sickness and consumption*,—they having indicated, perhaps, in their infancy, that their constitutions would prove to be feeble or diseased.

His removal from his countrymen, who knew and worshiped the true God, to dwell among a people that were idolaters and exceedingly wicked, was a very wrong step on the part of Elimelech. It was disobeying the commands, and distrusting the providence of God. The exigency of his situation furnished no adequate excuse. There were, doubtless, thousands of faithful Israelites who, in the midst of the famine and its attendant sufferings, remained at home, true to their allegiance to Jehovah, and relying on his intervention for aid. They would rather endure great privations for a season, than be guilty of disobedience to their Sovereign. The comforts and luxuries of the surrounding heathen nations they regarded as a poor compensation for the loss of his favor. If it must needs be, they chose to die in the path of duty, and not to expose themselves and their children to be led astray from the love and service of God by the temptations that would surround them.

Elimelech should have made the same choice. His not doing it brought down upon him and his family the severe expressions of the divine displeasure. He soon died, after struggling hard

to sustain himself and those who were dear to him ; and he left them, in the midst of a strange people, to rely on their own efforts for support. What a hapless condition for Naomi and her two sons ; *she* an unfriended widow, deprived of the solace of one on whose arm she had long leaned to sustain her through the hardships of life, and *they*, probably, able to do but little for the comfort of their mother or their own subsistence. How wistfully their eyes turned to their native land. How often they mused by day, and dreamed by night of their beloved Bethlehem, and longed and sighed to be there among their kindred and friends. The famine might be abated. Means of relief might be found. At any rate, they had rather be at home, to share the lot of their countrymen whatever it might be, than in their present condition, so full it was of discouragement.

It was full, too, of temptation,—and of a kind which even assailed with success the firmness of the pious Naomi. Whether she encouraged her sons, or only failed to use all the means in her power to deter them from it, we cannot tell ; but there is no mention of her dissenting in any way from the course which they pursued of taking, each of them, a wife from among the daughters of the Moabites. Perhaps she tried to persuade herself to believe that this was necessary, or at least excusable, in their necessitous circum-

stances ; or finding that Mahlon and Chilion were bent upon such alliances, she had not the resolution to interpose what authority she might have to prevent their being formed. For an Israelite thus to marry one of the heathen, was in direct defiance of the divine law. Naomi and her sons knew this. Yet they yielded to the temptation, hoping to make friends among the Moabites, and to enjoy some better means of improving their condition.

But what they did, only brought down upon them the additional rebukes of that Being whom they had offended. Permitted, perhaps, as is often the case with those who thus sin against God, to enjoy a short season of comparative prosperity, not more than ten years had elapsed since they first came among the Moabites, when Mahlon and Chilion died ; and Naomi, deprived now of both husband and sons, felt more keenly than ever the dreariness of her widowhood. It must have been the case, too, that she began to reflect on the various departures from duty of which Elimelech, herself, and her children had been guilty ; and to notice, in the afflictions and judgments which they endured, the displeasure of God and the chastisements that their transgressions deserved. She shed the tear of penitence. She raised the cry for pardon. She implored the divine aid, and resolved, as soon as Providence

might open the way, to leave the society of idolaters and return to her native land.

The incidents which have been related took place at a very remote period of time, and affected individuals in whose affairs we feel, perhaps, that we have no personal concern. But the dealings of God with Elimelech and his family are matters to us of deep interest. We should learn from what they did, and from what befell them, the lessons of wisdom. In seasons of calamity, as at all other times, the only place of safety is that of duty. We had better suffer with the children of God, and in our appropriate sphere of serving him, than to seek relief, even if we are sure of finding it, on forbidden ground, and among the worldly-minded and wicked.

To the faithful Israelite, *Bethlehem*, with all the temporal distress that it endured, was the home of his heart; nor could he be persuaded to leave it, by the promises of deliverance and ease which *Moab* might offer. Similar temptations will never cease to assail the believer as he passes along the course of his pilgrimage. But let him remember the fate of Elimelech and his two sons. *Let him keep near to God and his people*, and pray to be delivered from the influence of an ensnaring and corrupting world.

CHAPTER II.

Naomi sets out on her return to Bethlehem. Orpah and Ruth accompany her. The former turns back. The latter clings to her mother-in-law.

Glad news, at length, greeted the ears of Naomi. She had been anxious to receive it, and watching every rumor from Judea which would afford her the least favorable intelligence. The famine, she now learned, had ceased. Plenty was again cheering the hearts of the people. Could she but reach her long-desired Bethlehem, and find herself at home once more, where the wickedness of idolaters would no longer assail or entice her, and where she could enjoy the privilege of worshiping with her countrymen the God of her fathers,—how great would be her gratitude to him, and how devoted her future life to his service. She looked above for guidance. She prayed for divine aid. The path of duty appeared plain. Her purpose was formed; and she began to make the preparations which were necessary for the journey.

They occupied but little time. She neither expected nor received any assistance from her acquaintance among the Moabites. It does not appear that even the families into which her

sons had married, proffered a helping hand to encourage her on her way. It is much more probable that they did what they could to dissuade her from the undertaking, and reproached her for her folly and rashness. No camel, or attendants for protection, were furnished this poor widow, thus about to return to her native land. She must take the long journey on foot, with such conveniences only for her personal comfort as she could carry with her, or hope to receive from the hospitality of strangers. So that she soon was in readiness to bid the land of Moab a final farewell. Must not Naomi, under such circumstances, have partaken largely of the faith of Abraham, and like him relied with an unshaken confidence on the guardianship of Jehovah. What but this could have inspired her with such heroic resolution, or sustained her in view of the hardships and dangers she might have to encounter.

She is on the eve of departure. There are *two* who cannot endure the separation. They cling to Naomi with the affection of children. They are her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, —the widows of her sons,—whom she has caused to love and respect her as if she were their own mother. Although brought up in the midst of idolatry, they have learned to appreciate the character and the virtues of this excellent woman.

Doubtless she has taught them much of the true God, and of their duty to him ; and we shall soon have reason to believe that one of them, at least, is, in heart, of the faith of Israel.

They propose to accompany her ; it may be the whole extent of the journey, but, at any rate, some distance on the way. She consents, though reluctantly ; and they have not advanced far when Naomi's misgivings increase with regard to the propriety of what she is permitting them to do. It may be that they have stolen away without the knowledge of their friends. She may have to suffer the imputation of enticing them from their homes in a clandestine manner, and thus reproach will be brought upon her, not merely as an individual, but as an Israelite and a worshiper of the true God. Or if this is not so, she may fear their exposure to the dangers that will beset their path between Moab and Judea. She may doubt, too, whether her kindred will welcome the arrival of two such strangers from a heathen land.

For some one or all of these reasons, or others of equal weight, Naomi feels constrained, severe as is the struggle in her own breast, to make the sacrifice of parting for ever from her beloved Orpah and Ruth, and to proceed, a solitary traveler, on the journey that is before her. "Go," says she, with an aching heart, while the words

falter on her lips,—“Go, return each to her mother’s house: the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. The Lord grant that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband.” She embraces them, and gives the farewell kiss; and they all weep aloud.

But Orpah and Ruth cannot leave their mother-in-law. They will not consent to go back. “Surely we will return with thee unto thy people,” is their affectionate expostulation.

“Turn again, my daughter,” still urges Naomi; “why will ye go with me?”—She has no encouraging prospects in her own land to invite them to accompany her. Poor and friendless, (for she knows not whether she shall find her kindred in Bethlehem surviving,) and without sons to marry her widowed daughters-in-law, according to the customs of the Israelites, and provide for their comfort; she can see before them, should they go to Judea, nothing but the same adversity to which she appears herself to be destined. She fears she is still to endure the chastisements of the Lord, and would spare those whom she loves so tenderly the participation of her sufferings. “Turn again, my daughters; why will ye go with me?—It grieveth me much for your sakes, that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me.”

Again they weep aloud. Nature seeks relief in

tears. But grace is there, also, to do her work, and show her triumphant power. *One yields.* The dread of approaching calamity appals her. The security and comforts of her paternal dwelling rise up before her view with all their attractive charms. Perhaps the fascinations of sinful pleasure, and the rites of an idolatrous worship recall her with a seductive voice. Orpah falters in her purpose. Yet it is a hard struggle. She embraces her mother-in-law. She kisses her for the last time, and is soon seen retracing her steps homeward.

One cannot yield. Ruth cleaves to Naomi. She will not quit her side, although again urged to return and overtake her sister-in-law. "Entreat me not," she says, "to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also," (cause me to die, or inflict upon me any severer punishment,) "if aught but death part thee and me."

This was the language of something more than natural affection. Ruth loved Naomi with the attachment of a confiding daughter. But deeper, stronger feelings had taken hold of her breast, and swayed her purpose. She had listened often

to the pious instructions of her mother-in-law. She had seen the moral beauty of her character, and known its divine origin. The true God ; his laws ; his ordinances ; his worship ; his promises and his threatenings, had been contrasted by her with the folly and degrading sinfulness of idolatry. Her mind had been enlightened. Her conscience had been quickened to do its office. Grace had touched her heart. She was a believer in the God of the Israelites. She loved Naomi because she was a believer in him also. The bonds of holy affection knit their souls together, and Ruth clung with inflexible devotedness to one who had already guided her in the path towards heaven, and whose further example and counsels she could not consent to lose. Judea, too, had attractions to her of no ordinary kind. There she would find others who loved and served the God of Naomi. There she would witness, what her mother-in-law had often described to her, the solemnities of his pure and sacred worship, and be permitted to participate in them. There she would be withdrawn from the offensive practices, and dangerous temptations of the Moabites. There she would enjoy vastly better opportunities of making progress in the knowledge and love of Jehovah. Under the influence of such motives, she made known to Naomi, as we have seen, the fixed purpose of her soul in the emphatic as

surance that *nothing but death should part them.*

Happy choice! The God of Israel is the God of Ruth the Moabitess; and he will never leave her, nor forsake her.

And what, reader, is *your choice*? Like Orpah, are you to be found still giving your affections to a vain and sinful world, or, like Ruth, clinging to the people of God, and going with them on their way heavenward?

CHAPTER III.

Naomi and Ruth reach Bethlehem. Their reception. Ruth goes to glean in the fields of Boaz. He ascertains who she is.

Naomi could not resist the touching appeal of Ruth's entreaty to live and to die with her. "When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her;" saying nothing more to dissuade her from her purpose. The company of her daughter-in-law was a refreshing solace to this venerable woman; especially as she perceived that the determina-

tion of Ruth was the result as well of pious confidence in God, as of strong attachment to herself. They were kindred souls, endeared to each other by the ties of family alliance and intercourse; by the recollection of the many scenes of domestic enjoyment through which they had passed, and of the many trials that had called forth their mutual sympathies; by the hallowed memory of the dead; and still more by their love to the same God and their faith in his cheering promises. They proceeded on their journey, taking sweet counsel together; relying on the protecting arm of Jehovah; drawing lessons of practical wisdom from the past, and not cast down in their anticipations of the future. It was spring-time. Nature was reviving on every side. The almond-tree had blossomed, and was putting forth its fruit. The stately palm was in flower. Its first clusters were hanging on the grape-vine. The early shrubs and plants were budding into beauty, and filling the air with their fragrance. The scenes around them were hope-inspiring, as if prophetic of the kind dealings of Providence towards these two friendless females; and, after traversing in safety the long course of their journey, and receiving a share of the usual hospitality on their way, they reached, at length, the city of Bethlehem, at the commencement of the barley-harvest.

Their arrival was soon known, and produced a deep sensation throughout the whole place, many inquiring whether it was indeed true that Naomi had returned. Her old acquaintances thronged around her. "Is this Naomi? Is this Naomi?" was repeated on every side. It was the expression of doubt by some, and by others of surprise; while an intense curiosity pervaded the breasts of all, not a little increased by the view of the lovely Ruth, who stood in silence wondering at the scene before her, by the side of her mother-in-law.

"Call me not Naomi," or *my pleasant one*, she replied; "call me Mara," (that is *bitter*,) "for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?" She left Bethlehem, enjoying the love and protection of a husband, and the filial attachment of her two sons, with such provision for their comfort on the journey to Moab as was necessary. She had returned a widow and childless; poverty-stricken; and with a beloved daughter-in-law, for whom and herself she must now find the means of support. And in this she would have those around her notice the hand of divine chastisement. Her afflictions were the fruit of her sins. Her hus-

band, her children, and herself had not, as loyal Israelites, maintained their allegiance to Jehovah, and he had brought distress and death upon the other members of the family, while she, although spared through his great mercy to return to the land of her fathers, came back in sorrow and in want. Penitent Naomi! Thy trials did thee good. They brought thee back not only in person to thy country, but in heart to thy God ; and he soon showed how ready he was to restore to his favor, and to bless with his bounty, both the returning wanderer and her companion.

What hospitality these helpless females received from the kindred and friends of Naomi, we are not informed. But it would seem that it must have been very limited in degree, and short in duration. For we soon find Ruth proposing to her mother-in-law, that she should go into the adjacent fields and glean a few sheaves of barley after the reapers, as one means, and perhaps the only one, of their daily subsistence. With an endearing dutifulness, she not only suggested this step as a hopeful resort in their extremity, but urged the permission, which she feared the sensibility of Naomi, and her tender affection for a daughter-in-law, who was yet a stranger among the Israelites, might refuse. "Let me now go to the field," said she, "and glean ears of corn" (or grain) "after him in whose sight I shall find

grace." The Mosaic law had made provision for the poor and the stranger in this respect. It was an express command of God to the Israelites; "When ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of the harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the Lord your God." Yet Ruth wished not to be regarded as an intruder, nor appear to claim what she and her widowed mother-in-law needed, as a right. She would be careful to go only where she should readily find favor. She would glean in the fields of the kind-hearted, and thus be permitted to enjoy their bounty and secure their protection at the same time.

Naomi had confidence in the discretion of Ruth. She admired this additional proof of her affection, and complying with her request, commended her to the blessing of God. It was an eventful crisis, as we shall soon see, in the history of this young Moabitess. She was under the care of a covenant-keeping God, and his providence directed her steps. She soon gained welcome access to a field owned by one of the most powerful, wealthy, and benevolent men in Bethlehem; a near kinsman, too, of Elimelech, the father of her late husband, though, at the time,

she was ignorant of the fact. His name was Boaz, and it was not long before he came from the city, to see how those whom he had employed to gather in the harvest were making progress in their work. As he approached them he uttered the beautiful salutation which was customary in those days, "The Lord be with you;" and it met with its kindred and pious response from the reapers, "The Lord bless thee." Delightful simplicity of a primitive age, when the usual forms of courtesy were thus hallowed by devout aspirations. How infinitely superior to the spiritless and artificial interchange of civilities which too often marks the politeness of modern times. The inquiries which we make respecting the condition of our friends, or the blessings that we invoke upon them, are almost always of a temporal kind, relating to *the body*, and to the concerns of this world, while those which regard *the soul* and its eternal interests are neglected. Sad evidence this not only of a degenerate taste, but of a stupid and groveling heart!

Ruth soon attracted the notice of Boaz. There was that in her appearance and demeanor which could not fail to do this. Not improbably, others were there who had been gleaning in different parts of the field, but she was conspicuous among the rest. A female; a stranger; known perhaps,

at sight, to be of some foreign nation; and withal so unassuming and interesting, his curiosity was awakened, and he inquired of the one that had the oversight of the reapers, who she was. "It is the Moabitish damsel," was the reply, "that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab: and she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house," or tent.

In this temporary shelter it would seem that Ruth, with the reapers and others, had withdrawn for a short respite from their toil; and here Providence opened the way for her receiving still kinder treatment in the prosecution of her labors, and greater and unexpected blessings.

It was *in the path of duty* that God thus met with his favor this humble, industrious, and pious female, striving with her own hands to fulfill the duties which she felt she owed to the poor and venerated mother of her deceased husband, and to earn the pittance which was needed for their mutual support. Such are those whom the High and Holy One condescends to visit and to cheer. Without friends, without wealth, without worldly expectations, as was Ruth the Moabitess; like her, also, they have *the mighty God for their guardian and benefactor*. They shall want

no good thing, nothing that is best for them in this life, and in that to come theirs shall be the treasures of that *inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.*

CHAPTER IV.

Boaz treats Ruth with great kindness. She is advised by Naomi to continue to glean in the fields of Boaz, which she does till the end of the harvest.

The sympathy of Boaz for the female stranger before him, already awakened by the loveliness of her personal appearance and the modest propriety of her demeanor, was not a little increased by his being informed who she was. For he had heard of Ruth and her kind conduct towards Naomi, and of her leaving an idolatrous people, and her own home and kindred, that she might dwell among the worshipers of that God in whom she had of late been taught to believe. He had conceived a high respect for a character of so much worth, and he now rejoiced in the opportunity of manifesting his esteem and kindness to the individual who possessed it.

"Hearest thou not, my daughter?" said he, inviting her averted look with this encouraging appellation,—"Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens. Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn."

Ruth was thus, at once, favored with the privilege of gleaning after the reapers, even as long as the harvest lasted, and under such circumstances as would secure her daily comfort and her protection from all insult or injury. She felt truly grateful for it. According to the custom of the East, when an inferior accosts one of superior rank, she bowed herself quite to the ground, and addressing Boaz, said, with a modest surprise at his unexpected and singular kindness, "Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?" A stranger, too, from a heathen nation whom the Israelites were taught to regard as corrupt and degraded, and with whom, as a people, they were commanded not to have intercourse. How was it that a man of his distinction and wealth should treat one like herself with so much beneficence? For she probably

knew not that Boaz was acquainted with her relationship to Naomi; or if she suspected that such might be the case, she had too humble an opinion of herself to advert, even in thought, to any thing in her character or conduct that would tend to procure his favor. Yet it *was* her character and conduct which had been principally instrumental in doing this; thus teaching us what true merit can accomplish, even in a low and obscure condition, in preparing its possessor to secure the friendship of those who have the disposition and the ability to do good.

The reply of Boaz to Ruth's inquiry was a striking illustration of the courteous benignity and deep piety of his character. He would relieve her from all embarrassment growing out of any feelings of peculiar obligation to himself, and direct her gratitude to that Being who had infinitely the highest claim to it,—the Source of every blessing. "It hath been fully showed me," said he, "all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thy husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust."

Yes; Ruth had indeed taken shelter beneath

the covert of Jehovah's protection. She relied on his providential aid ; but she knew, while she felt a devout thankfulness to God for his mercies, that he employed the agency of man in fulfilling his benevolent designs. His hand had already guided her to the field where she had been gleaning, and here she trusted that he would still bless her efforts in the performance of duty. "Let me," said she, addressing Boaz respectfully, as she raised herself from the ground,— "Let me find favor in thy sight, my lord ; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens."

He was ready to do every thing to lighten and refresh her labors. He invited her to partake of their frugal meal ; and, at the customary time, she was seated beside the maidens. She dipped her bread in the vinegar, or cooling acid-liquor, which was used on such occasions, and partook of the parched grain, (or, it may be, a kind of beans roasted over the coals,) to which Boaz, who made one of the number, helped her with his own hand.

On resuming their work, Ruth was allowed a new privilege. Those who gleaned were usually permitted to do it only where the sheaves had been bound, and the shocks set up. But Boaz now gave different orders to his young men.

"Let her glean," said he, "even among the sheaves, and reproach her not: and let fall also some of the handfulls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not."

So every thing conspired to render the first day of Ruth's labors easy and pleasant. She pursued them with cheerful alacrity until it drew to a close. She then beat out the grain that she had gleaned, and found that it amounted to nearly an ephah of barley, or seven gallons and a half. It was a good day's work, and encouraged her in her efforts thus happily begun. She returned to her humble dwelling in the city, and presented to Naomi the fruit of her toil; giving her, also, what she had reserved, for this purpose, of the portion distributed to her at meal-time, and which was more than she needed. This little circumstance shows not only the provident kindness of Ruth towards her mother-in-law, but, with other occurrences in their history, the very necessitous condition in which these two widowed females were then placed.

What a heart-felt satisfaction did the result of her first day's toil to procure subsistence for Naomi and herself afford this dutiful daughter-in-law. It relieved them from all fears of want, and of dependence on those around them. Ruth had a feeling of praise-worthy exultation in this. Her

own hands, under the blessing of God, were equal to meet the exigencies of their case. Daily industry would prove a sure resource. If health and strength continued, it could not fail. Naomi rejoiced with her, full of devout gratitude, and anxious to know who the individual was that had treated her with so much kindness, invoking the blessing of God upon him. On being told that it was Boaz, "Blessed be he of the Lord," she exclaimed, "who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead,"—who now shows us this favor by permitting you to glean so largely in his fields, and whose former good-will to my deceased husband and sons I shall never forget. She added, that Boaz was their near kinsman.

Ruth, then, informed Naomi that the privileges which she had been enjoying would be allowed her till the end of the harvest, if she saw fit to make use of them. This her mother-in-law advised her, by all means, to do, and not to expose herself to the risk of receiving far different treatment by gleaning in any other fields, whatever flattering promise they might present of superior advantages. Ruth was too discreet herself not to see the wisdom of such counsel; and, during the three or four successive months both of the harvest of barley and of wheat, "kept fast by the maidens of Boaz," in the prosecution of her daily

labors. So the spring and part of the summer passed away ; Naomi attending to their domestic concerns, and her daughter-in-law not only providing the means of their comfortable support, but all the while, as they practiced the most frugal economy, laying up something to meet the pressure of any future and increasing exigencies.

What a worthy example of piety, of dutifulness to her aged mother, and of virtuous discretion did this young Moabitess exhibit. No gadding curiosity, or fickle fondness for change, led her into untried scenes of danger. Having found, as she and Naomi thought, *the place of duty*, of honest and industrious employment where her labors met with a certain and encouraging reward, she remained in it, grateful to God for his mercies, and leaving it to his providence to direct her future course.

Let the youthful reader ponder well *the wisdom of imitating Ruth in this respect.*

CHAPTER V.

Naomi advises Ruth to present her claim to Boaz, to take her as his wife. She does this.

It was not only a custom among the Israelites, but a law of God to that effect, that if a man died childless, his brother, or nearest kinsman, should marry the widow, and *their children* be regarded as the heirs of the deceased, and bear his name. Naomi probably considered Boaz as the kinsman that stood in this relation to Ruth, and thought that, as it was in accordance with the uniform practice of her countrymen, it would be no departure from the strictest delicacy to remind him of his duty. The widow had rights in this case granted to her by God himself, and it was proper that she should cause them to be regarded. Besides, Naomi was advancing in years, and should she be removed by death, her daughter-in-law would be left among strangers, in a condition to need protection. Where could she look for it under such favorable circumstances as in the marriage state? Her virtues, too, rendered her worthy of the best of husbands; while both the providence and the ordinance of God pointed to Boaz as the one with whom Ruth was probably destined to form such an alliance.

We need duly to estimate these various considerations, together with the customs prevailing at the time, (in many respects so widely different from our own,) to view in its true light the course which these two friendless and unprotected females pursued. Singular as some things which they did may now appear, they were not at all regarded so by those who then lived in Judea, and took a part in them. In addition to this, we must bear in mind, as we proceed in the narrative, the complete evidence which is furnished, by what we learn of their history, that the three individuals concerned were possessed of characters, pious and exemplary in an eminent degree.

At the proper time, and especially after Ruth had given Boaz an ample opportunity of forming some correct opinion of her worth as an excellent and interesting young woman, Naomi, one day, thus accosted her : "My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee ? (a home of thy own, in which thou mayest find, at least, a temporary repose from those trials and hardships of life that may befall thee as I grow more decrepid, or when death shall call me hence ?) Is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast ?" Does he not, as such, appear to be presented to us, in the providence of God, as the one prepared to show thee still greater kindness, in accordance with our

laws and usages, by becoming thy lord and guardian in the marriage-state? He ought, by this time, to have the opportunity of discharging this sacred duty. Our custom is for the widow of the deceased to remind the nearest kinsman of his obligations; and this it now falls to thy lot to do with regard to Boaz. The end of his harvest has come; "he winnoweth barley to-night in the threshing-floor," (to take advantage of the coolness of the season, and of the breeze which blows at that time, in separating the grain from the chaff;) and as he is finishing this laborious part of his affairs, he will be the more at leisure to listen to thy claims.

Naomi then requested Ruth to prepare herself for the occasion by putting on her best apparel; so that she might appear at the harvest-supper, to which she had doubtless been invited with the other maidens, in a neat and becoming manner. She was not, however, to make known her errand till the feast was concluded, and the company dispersed. Some other directions were given her, and having received the blessing of her mother-in-law, she proceeded with a trembling solicitude, though trusting in God for support, to the discharge of the duty assigned her.

After the labors of the evening were over, and the rural festival had closed, those who took a part in them withdrew; and Boaz, having a glad

and grateful heart, refreshed by the bounties of Providence and adoring the Lord for his goodness, retired to rest. He was not aware that any one lingered behind; and practicing the simple habits to which he was accustomed, made the threshing-floor his couch, spreading out some of the barley-straw on which to repose, and covering himself with his outer-garment, or cloke, which alone the mild temperature of the air rendered necessary. The building had a roof to protect its occupants from any inclemency of weather. It could be opened on all sides, to admit the wind freely for the winnowing of the grain, and be closed at night for security or comfort; and it was customary for the owner of the field, or some one in his employment, to sleep there, at certain seasons, to be a guard against plunder.

One of the guests had remained, unobserved by Boaz or the rest. It was Ruth, who now waited for a favorable opportunity to make known her claims in the manner that Naomi had directed. She was desirous of placing herself in the attitude of one who had come in the most unobtrusive and respectful way to present her request, and in accordance with the customs of the times, she lay down at the feet of Boaz, under the covering of the ample garment which extended quite beyond them. It was not long before he discovered, with considerable apprehen-

sions, that some one was there, and inquired who it might be. "I am Ruth, thine handmaid," was the reply: "spread, therefore, thy skirt," (or *wing*, as it may be rendered,) "over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman." As if she had said, *take me under the wing of thy protection by making me thy wife*—(for this is the true import of the metaphorical language which she used,)—since *the relationship between thee and my late husband justifies me in reminding thee of thy duty to obey the divine injunction in this respect.**

* All inferiors, all servants, sleep at the feet of their master. It is no uncommon thing for those who have a great favor to procure, to go to the house of the rich, and sleep with the head at his door, or in the verandah. Thus, when he arises in the morning, he finds the suppliant at his door. Should a master wish to dismiss his servants, they often say, "My lord, turn us not away; how many years have we slept at your feet?"—ROBERTS.

The prophet Ezekiel, in describing the Jewish church as an exposed infant, mentions the care of God in bringing her up with great tenderness, and then, at the proper time, marrying her; which is expressed in the same way as the request of Ruth: "I spread my skirt over thee"—"and thou becamest mine." Dr. A. Clarke says, "Even to the present day, when a Jew marries a woman, he throws the skirt or end of his talith over her, to signify that he has taken her under his protection." I have been delighted at the marriage ceremonies of the Hindoos, to see among them the same interesting custom. The bride is seated on a throne, surrounded by matrons, having on her veil, her

Before relating the reply which Boaz gave to Ruth, it may be useful to suspend the narrative a moment, to make one or two reflections which the scene that has just been described suggests. Men of corrupt minds, and disposed to scoff at the sacred Scriptures, have sometimes endeavored to pervert it, in connection with what follows, to suit their own depraved taste and unworthy purposes. But it defies their contaminating touch. We have already seen, and as we proceed in the history, shall have additional proof of the fact, that these transactions in which Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz took a part, were alike marked by the strictest purity and delicacy of their deportment towards each other, and by a reverential regard to the divine commands.

gayest robes, and most valuable jewels. After the thali has been tied round her neck, the bridegroom approaches her with a silken skirt, (purchased by himself,) and folds it round her several times over the rest of her clothes. A common way of saying he has married her, is, "he has given her the *koori*," has spread the skirt over her. An angry husband sometimes says to his wife, "give me back my skirt," meaning, he wishes to have the marriage compact dissolved. So the mother-in-law, should the daughter not treat her respectfully, says, "My son gave this woman the *koori*, skirt, and has made her respectable, but she neglects me." The request of Ruth, therefore, amounted to nothing more than that Boaz should marry her.—ROBERTS.

Different ages and nations are in no respects more strikingly contrasted, than by the various manners and customs which prevail among them. Especially is this true, when Eastern people are compared with Europeans of the present time, or the Jews of old with ourselves. The more we become acquainted with these varieties of customs and manners, the more shall we find a clearer light thrown upon many passages of Scripture, which, for the want of this information, may have been involved in a degree of obscurity, or liable to some misapprehension. And the more thorough our examination is, the deeper will be our conviction, if we have docile and candid minds, that *the word of God is pure, enlightening the eyes ; and, in all its parts, profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*

CHAPTER VI.

The reply of Boaz to the claims of Ruth. She returns to Naomi. Boaz at the gate of the city. His interview with the kinsman of Elimelech. Boaz becomes the husband of Ruth. Obed is born. Conclusion.

The reply of Boaz to the request of Ruth was truly characteristic of his piety, delicacy, and frankness. He spoke as a father to his child, endeavoring to relieve her from any perturbation or embarrassment of feeling that the urging of her claim in the manner which she did might produce. "Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter," said he ; "for thou hast showed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich." With *such*, more nearly her equals in age than himself, who had advanced considerably beyond her in years, it would not have been strange had she preferred an alliance in marriage. But her reverence for the divine law, he perceived, had led Ruth to wish that, in her own case, its requisitions might be strictly fulfilled by the kinsman of her deceased husband becoming her husband. In this, also, her affectionate regard to Naomi was even more manifest than in what she had formerly done when she left

her own country and kindred to accompany that poor, widowed, and friendless mother-in-law to Judea. For nothing could be so agreeable to the wishes of Naomi, as appeared from the course which she had pursued, nor conduce so much to make her declining days comfortable and cheerful, as the marriage of her daughter-in-law to one of such respectability and wealth as was Boaz.

He continued addressing Ruth: "Fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest." I will see that the claims of thy widowhood are duly respected, and thy rights secured in accordance with the divine commands; and if it proves to be my duty to take the place of thy deceased husband, I shall not hesitate,—understanding well, as I do, the excellence of thy character; "for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman."

He then went on to say that, although he was her near kinsman, there was another individual who was still nearer than himself, on whom the duty of becoming her husband first devolved; and as the night had so far advanced, and it would be inconvenient for her to return home, he requested her to wait till the morning. He would himself be in the city in good season, and attend immediately to this matter in which she and her mother-in-law were so deeply interested. If the individual to whom he had referred would not

perform his duty as the nearest kinsman of Ruth, Boaz solemnly engaged himself to take her in marriage. "Then," said he, "will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the Lord liveth."

Ruth was ready to depart at a very early hour. Boaz requested her not to make it public that she had been there, lest some evil-minded persons might subject them to unmerited reproach. He also desired her, before going, to bring the veil, or rather large mantle which she wore, and carry in it what she could of barley, for the use of herself and Naomi. Receiving this seasonable and liberal supply for their necessities, she returned to the city, and informed her mother-in-law of all that had taken place. With her customary discretion, Naomi advised Ruth to wait patiently for the issue of the affair; assuring her that Boaz was a man not to rest satisfied till he had, that very day, come to a conclusion respecting it.

She was not mistaken, and Boaz soon repaired to the gate of the city to accomplish his purpose. There the concourse of people was frequent and numerous. There some of the most important transactions took place, and justice was usually administered. It was a convenient place in these respects; so that laborers, of whom there were many, going out to the fields and returning, might lose no time, and that the people residing in the

country might not be obliged to enter the town. Boaz sat down there, to notice those who made up the crowd, or who passed by, and soon discerning the kinsman of Naomi of whom he had spoken to Ruth, called to him to come and take a seat also, which he did. Boaz then requested ten of the elders of the city, who happened to be present, to sit near them as witnesses, and proceeded to bring forward the business.

He informed the kinsman of Naomi, that she, having returned from Moab, was about to sell a right in a parcel of land which had belonged to Elimelech ; to redeem which, so that it might not pass out of the family, was his privilege, as the nearest relation, if he saw fit to do it. Should he decline, however, then Boaz, who was the next of kin after the other, expressed his wish to know it, that *he* might have the opportunity.

The individual to whom the proposal was made immediately acceded to it, agreeing to redeem the land. But on being told that an indispensable condition of the validity of the transaction would be his coming into possession of the property by obtaining the right which Ruth, the Moabitess, had in it, and that, to effect this, he must marry her, so as to preserve the name of her deceased husband in connection with the inheritance, he declined. He feared, he said, that by doing this he should injure his own inheritance ; thinking

that his marriage under such circumstances would, on the whole, affect his affairs unfavorably; or, perhaps, he had some other alliance in view that he considered more advantageous, and by which he should have the prospect of preserving *his own name* with his inheritance among his descendants. He relinquished his right, therefore, to redeem the land, and transferred it, on the spot, to Boaz; confirming the act by taking off his shoe and giving it to the latter, in the presence of the ten witnesses. The meaning of this ceremony it is very difficult, and perhaps impossible to determine. Among other conjectures, why may not this, though a simple, be the true one? The shoe, or sandal, was a very convenient article of property,—the most so to be employed on such occasions, to be transferred from one to another, signifying that as the person to whom it was given had now the new use and entire ownership of it, he was also to have the absolute right to that which was conveyed to him at the time, and of which the shoe was the representative.

Boaz was, at once, ready to take the place of the other kinsman, and called upon the elders, and all the people who were near, to be witnesses of the transaction. He engaged, before them, to buy of Naomi all that she had to sell of what was once Elimelech's, and to take Ruth to

be his wife, that the name of her late husband might not be lost.

"We are witnesses," was the unanimous and cordial reply; while some one of the elders probably—in behalf of those who were present—in voked the Divine blessing upon Boaz and his proposed alliance. "The Lord make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem: to which was added the prayer that his house,—(his children and their descendants,)—might compare with those who were the offspring of Pharez, the son of Judah and Tamar, and from whom the Bethlehemites, now a very numerous and prosperous people, were descended.

Thus the important affair was settled. Ruth became the wife of Boaz, and was not only raised to a condition of great respectability and influence among the Israelites, but attained the still higher distinction of being *one from whom the Messiah was descended*. On the birth of her son it is pleasant to notice the friendly congratulations which the grandmother Naomi received, and the deep interest that she took in the child. "Blessed be the Lord," said her female acquaintances to her,—"Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his

name may be famous in Israel. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age ; for thy daughter-in-law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him. And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it."—Delightful example and sanction of *the domestic affections!* How careful is the word of God to inculcate, to cherish, and to bless their exercise, and the faithful performance of the duties to which they lead. Every thing that tends to disparage them in our estimation ; to weaken their hold upon the conscience and the heart ; or to blunt the exquisite sensibility which should characterize them while life lasts, is alike recreant to the finest and most generous feelings of our nature, and hostile to the spirit of piety. *He that loveth not those to whom he is bound by the tenderest ties, whom he hath seen, how can he love his Father in heaven whom he hath not seen?* Be it never forgotten, that the Saviour himself, in his expiring moments, fulfilled the sacred obligations of filial duty ; and while consummating his great work, *felt that he was a son*, and entrusted the care of a revered mother to the disciple whom he loved.

The friends of Naomi proposed a name for the infant, which she and its parents adopted. It was called *Obed*, which means *serving*, and was in-

tended, probably, to denote the expectation that the child would prove to be one who would render important services to his family and people. All, however, that we know of him, is, that he had a son, Jesse, who was the father of David,—from whom, in process of time, came Christ our Saviour and Lord. Nor is any thing more related of the interesting individuals to whose history we have been attending. We have reason to believe, that a kind Providence watched over and blessed them in their declining days; that Naomi died in a good old age, and was gathered to her fathers in peace; and that Boaz and Ruth, instructed by the wisdom of her counsels, and imitating her worthy example,—happy in the alliance which they had formed in the fear of God and from a pure attachment to each other,—filled up the measure of their lives, piously and benevolently, in the discharge of their appropriate duties, and were, at length, admitted to join the spirits of the redeemed in heaven.

The Book of Ruth holds an important place in the sacred volume. It serves as an introduction to the books of Samuel, in which the history of David is contained, as it gives the genealogy of that prince. In addition to the religious instruction with which it abounds, it has stood, for ages, an illustration of the truth of the prophecies that the Messiah should be of the tribe

of Judah, and of the family of David ; and a memorial of his lineage, of very ancient date, so essential to the completeness of the divine record concerning him. Let us bless its divine Author for giving it to us. Let us implore the influences of his Spirit, that our review of its contents, in connection with the practical reflections that have been suggested, may serve to confirm our faith in his promises, our trust in his providence, and our cordial obedience to his commands. Let us rely, with penitent and believing hearts, on *that Saviour* to whom this portion of Scripture points us ; whose anticipated sacrifice drew down the mercies of a forgiving God upon Naomi, Boaz, and Ruth ; and *through whose atoning blood we can alone hope for the pardon of our sins, and the divine favor.*

THE END.



Samuel presented to Eli by his Mother.

SCRIPTURE BIOGRAPHY FOR THE YOUNG,

WITH

CRITICAL ILLUSTRATIONS

AND

PRACTICAL REMARKS.

SAMUEL.

INCLUDING THE LIFE OF SAUL.

BY REV. T. H. GALLAUDET.

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S A M U E L .

CHAPTER I.

Samuel's parentage. His mother's vow.

While Eli, the high priest, was judge over Israel, about twelve hundred years before the birth of Christ, a distinguished individual appeared, whose history now comes before us. His father was Elkanah, a Lévite ; living in Ramah, a city of Benjamin between Gaba and Bethel, towards the mountains of Ephraim, and six miles north of Jerusalem. It was also called "Rama-thaim-zophim,"—*the two high places of the watchmen* ; probably indicating that the city stood on two adjacent hills, remarkable for a tower on each, in which a guard was kept for the safety of the country.

The custom, at that time, still existed, though in a limited degree, of a man's having more than one wife. It was tolerated, indeed, by the Mosaic law, but was not in accordance with the original

institution of the marriage relation, and often produced great evils in domestic life. Our Saviour teaches his followers their duty, in this respect, in the most explicit manner. He says; "Have ye not read, that He which made them at the beginning, made them male and female ; and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife ; and they twain shall be one flesh ? *Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh.* What, therefore, God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." And it is enjoined by an apostle, *Let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.*

Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. The latter was a mother, but the former not, which was a great grief to her ; every married female among the Israelites regarding children as a peculiar blessing, since, in this way, she might be honored by having the Messiah among her descendants.

The ark of God was now at Shiloh ; and there all the males were required, thrice a year, to go up from every part of Judea, to attend the national festivals of the passover, pentecost, and feast of tabernacles. Elkanah, who seems to have been a devout man, living in the fear of God and obeying his commands, not only did this himself but took his family with him. He



well knew the salutary impressions that would thus be made on their minds, and how much it would aid him in the arduous work of training up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

On such occasions, after bringing the other appointed sacrifices, Elkanah presented his peace-offering. The blood of the victim was poured at the foot of the altar. The fat was burned on the fire. The breast and right shoulder were the portion of the priest, and the rest belonged to him who made the offering. On it, as was customary, Elkanah and his family feasted,—he distributing to each an appropriate portion. But the best one he always gave to Hannah. She seems to have shared largely in his affections ; and it may be that by this peculiar mark of favor he wished to show his love towards her, notwithstanding she bore him no children ; to console her under the sorrow which she felt on this account ; and to let his family see that it produced no abatement of his attachment and respect.

Peninnah, his other wife, was much displeased at this partiality, as she deemed it. Her conduct towards Hannah was very unkind and provoking. She frequently reproached her for being childless, and especially on the occasions to which we have alluded, of going up to Shiloh, when they feasted together before the Lord. Perhaps

Elkanah was not discreet in making the distinction which he did, at such times, between his two wives. He may have indulged in an unwarrantable favoritism. At any rate there was fault somewhere; resulting in jealousy and an overbearing spirit on the part of Peninnah, and causing Hannah to sink in despondency under the accumulated pressure of mortification, insult, and grief. It shows us some of the peculiar evils, among many others, of polygamy, and how thankful we should be that we live under the christian dispensation, and in a condition of society, where the marriage relation confined to *one husband and one wife*, furnishes in this respect the surest safe-guard to the happiness of the family state.

At one of the festivals, after being exposed, as usual, to the taunts of Peninnah, Hannah's heart was so full that she burst into tears, and refused to eat. Elkanah endeavored to soothe her. "Why wepest thou?" said he, "and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?" Grateful as was this sympathy to her, she knew that she must look to a higher source for comfort. She had often found relief in prayer, and she hoped again to find it by holding communion with her God.

Their repast being finished, she repaired to the door of the tabernacle, there to pour forth the feelings of her troubled soul into the ear of One

whom she knew to be both willing to hear, and mighty to succor.

In the bitterness of her sorrow, she wept sore as she prayed. "And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man-child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head." From his birth he should be consecrated to God as a *Nazarene*. Such a person, during the continuance of the time for which the vow was made, was obliged by the Mosaic law to abstain from wine or strong drink; not even to eat of the fruit of the vine; to let his hair grow without cutting or shaving; and to beware of all contamination from corpses, the bones of the dead, and sepulchres. These things were intended to mark him as peculiarly *set apart* for the service of God; and such the pious Hannah vowed her son should be during the whole of his life, if this blessing were granted her. He would be, indeed, as a descendant of the house of Levi, the Lord's property from twenty-five years of age till fifty; but the vow of Hannah implied that he should be consecrated to God from his infancy to his death, and that he should not only act as a common Levite, but be under the still stronger obligations

of those who were ranked among the Nazarites.

It is altogether probable that this purpose of his wife had previously been made known to Elkanah, and received his approbation. Her vow, therefore, may be regarded as the mutual pledge of herself and her husband ; and the child to be lent them by the Lord, instead of becoming the ensnaring idol of their affections, was to be given back to him, as peculiarly his own, and to be employed by him as he might deem best.

Happy parents, who can thus, devoutly and without reserve, consecrate their beloved children to God ; setting them apart from the pursuit of the pleasures, the riches, and the honors of the world to his peculiar service, and the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom ! Happy children who have such parents ! For if to the faith which makes the dedication, be added the prayer and the efforts that are needed to bring up their offspring aright, their hopes shall not be disappointed. God will accept the offering. What an honor to have it accepted ! What a privilege to the child—*belonging to the Lord*, to be under his special care and guidance ; while in life to be employed for the promotion of his glory ; and when removed hence to be admitted to his nobler service in the upper world.

My young friend, are you the child of pious parents ? Then what obligations rest upon you.

Feel them deeply, and pray for grace that you may fulfil them. Are you *not* the child of pious parents. Then, if possible, give the greater diligence to make your calling and election sure

CHAPTER II.

Samuel's birth. His dedication to the service of the sanctuary.

Eli, the high priest, was sitting upon his seat of authority, near the entrance of the tabernacle, while Hannah was praying before the Lord. She continued her supplications for some time ; and so engaged was she in them that, although she spoke not audibly, her lips moved in accordance with the sentiments of her heart. Eli noticed it ; and the peculiarity of her manner led him to suppose that she might be under the influence of too much wine. "How long wilt thou be drunken ?" said he—"put away thy wine from thee."

Under the affecting circumstances in which she was placed this was a severe reproach for Hannah to endure. But she bore it meekly. She was prepared thus to bear it. She was holding

communion with her God ; and prayer, proceeding from a pious and confiding heart, and drawing down upon the soul the influences of divine grace, furnishes it with strength to suffer, patiently and calmly, any trials however great.

"No, my lord," was her respectful reply ; "I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit : I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial : for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto."

Eli was satisfied that he had been too hasty in his judgment. "Go in peace," said he, "and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him."

"Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight," (think favorably of me, and let me be remembered in thy prayers,) was the reply of Hannah, as she went her way from the door of the tabernacle ; her heart cheered with hope in the divine goodness, and her countenance no longer sad, but lighted up by the relief she had obtained. She partook of the food which her husband had set before her, while this mark of her returning composure led him to rejoice with her ; and early the next morning, after worshipping before the Lord, Elkanah and his family returned to Ramah.

The petition which Hannah had offered up at Shiloh was at length answered. She became a mother, and called the infant *Samuel*, which signifies "asked of the Lord," intending by this name to preserve the remembrance of her request, and of the divine favor in granting it.

It was not long after this joyful event before Elkanah and his family, with the exception of Hannah and her child, went up again to Shiloh to offer the customary sacrifice, and himself especially to perform a vow which he had made. The nature of this vow is not mentioned, but it is not improbable that it related to the birth of Samuel, a blessing which he had long desired, and for which he now felt truly grateful. Hannah declined going. She was under no obligation to do it from any express command, the injunction reaching only to the males among the Israelites; and she preferred remaining at home until the child was old enough to be weaned. "Then," said she, "I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide for ever."

To this Elkanah made no objection. "Do what seemeth thee good," was his kind reply; "tarry until thou have weaned him, only the Lord establish his word,"—preserve the child, and cause him to grow up to fulfil the great purpose for which he was dedicated to God, and which the granting of so rich a blessing seems to imply.

that the divine promise stands pledged to carry into effect.

The Jewish children, we have reason to believe, were not weaned till they were three years of age. Young Samuel had reached this period, when his mother concluded, doubtless with the approbation of her husband, and himself uniting with her in the design, to take him to Shiloh, and there perform the solemn act of publicly dedicating him to Jehovah.

On their arrival with the child, and probably the other members of the family, they presented their offering of consecration before the Lord, and brought Samuel to the high priest, Eli. As they appeared in the presence of this venerable man, Hannah told him that she was the person whom he had formerly noticed standing near him, and offering up her supplications. "For this child I prayed," she continued, "and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him. Therefore also I have lent" (or returned) "him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord."

To these sacrificial offerings, and the declarations of his mother, followed an act of worship on the part of Samuel himself—probably some short and simple prayer, taught him for the occasion, and which he was enabled to utter with a deep feeling of its import, and a reverential propriety.

Hannah, too, under a divine impulse, broke forth into a strain of praise, partaking of the prophetic character, and using for the first time in the sacred Scriptures, the term "Messiah," or Christ *the anointed one*, with reference to the promised Saviour. "The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces;" is the conclusion of this sublime hymn; "out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his King, and exalt the horn of his *anointed!*"

She, thus, foretold both the judgments of God upon the Philistines, which took place during her son's administration, and those remoter ones which were to happen ages afterwards. Like Jacob, Balaam, and Moses, she described the expected Saviour of the world as a KING, before there was any king in Israel, and applied to him the remarkable epithet MESSIAH, which was adopted by David, Nathan, Isaiah, Daniel, and the succeeding prophets of the Old Testament, and by the writers of the New.

Having performed her vow, Hannah and her husband prepared to return home. Before doing this, however, they had the pious satisfaction of seeing their child begin to minister unto the Lord in his temple, under the direction of Eli. He performed some little services to which even his

tender age was competent, and was clad in a linen ephod, an ornamental part of the dress of the Hebrew priests. It was worn above the tunic and robe, without sleeves, and open below the arms on each side. It consisted of two pieces, one of which covered the front of the body and the other the back, joined together on the shoulders by golden buckles set with gems, reaching down to the middle of the thigh, and fastened round the body by a girdle.

Eli would not let Elkanah and his wife depart without his blessing, in giving which he prayed that the Lord would bestow upon them other children as a gracious mark of his favor for the dedication of their only and beloved son to his service. His prayer was answered; and Hannah, in process of time, became the happy mother of three sons and two daughters. In the meanwhile Samuel increased in stature, "and was in favor both with the Lord, and also with men." His parents continued to visit him, when they came up to offer the yearly sacrifice; on which occasions his mother always brought him "a little coat" of her own making, as a pledge of her continued and strong affection.

It seems there was something which even a child of three years of age could do, as a service to the Lord in his holy temple. What a privilege to be thus employed! Is it denied to

children at the present day? Can they not, like Samuel, grow in the divine favor, and serve God more and more as they increase in stature? Surely they may. They are not, indeed, called to any kind of employment in the places of public worship; for the Jewish customs in this respect no longer exist. But they can *serve God* in various other ways. If they have right feelings; and pray for the influence and blessing of the Holy Spirit; and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Guide; and desire to obey the divine commands, they can daily render to God a peculiar and acceptable service. They can show in their conversation and conduct, that they love their God and Saviour; that they honor their parents, and those who have the care of them; and that they are ready to be kind and benevolent to all around them. This will be serving the Lord as truly as Samuel did. O that all children would do it! O that all parents would pray *for* and *with* their children, that God, by his grace, would lead and enable them to do it!

CHAPTER III.

The wickedness of Eli's sons. The divine denunciation against him.

Eli had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. They were very wicked men—*sons of Belial*, that is, of *worthlessness*; knowing not the Lord in the spirit of obedience to his commands, and guilty of the vilest and most shameful conduct.

Instead of discharging the duties of the priesthood, and especially those which related to the offering up of sacrifices, in accordance with the levitical law and in a becoming manner, they violated this law grossly, and showed their selfishness and sensuality before all the people. When an Israelite sacrificed a peace-offering, one of their servants came while the flesh was boiling, and holding a hook with three teeth in his hand, struck it into the vessel, and took up what he could with it for the priest's portion.

In like manner, before the fat was burnt the servant came and required of him who made the sacrifice, that he should give of the raw flesh to the priest, who would not have it boiled, but roasted for his own use. If any one remonstrated against this profanation of a sacred ordinance, he was peremptorily told, that if he did not yield

what was demanded it should be taken by force. All this was in direct violation of the divine commands. For when the peace-offerings were made, the blood, the fat, the kidneys, and the caul were offered to the Lord; the rest of the sacrifice belonging to the offerer except the right shoulder and the breast, which was the portion of the priest. This was not to be given to him till it was dressed, and he was not to take it till the fat had been offered on the fire of the altar.

The consequence of such great wickedness on the part of Hophni and Phinehas, was, that the people began to neglect, and even to despise the presenting of offerings to the Lord when they saw them profaned in so bold and outrageous a manner. It is not improbable, too, that many declined going up to Shiloh at all, at the times of the yearly sacrifices, or made these sacrifices in other places, contrary to the divine law. Thus great injury was done to the cause of godliness, and a fearful danger incurred of the people's falling into a state of irreligion and idolatry.

Eli was aware of these things, and of the vile and shameless profligacy of his sons on other occasions. He did nothing, however, but expostulate with them in a very gentle tone, when he should have interposed the sternness both of his parental and official authority to put a stop to

their wickedness. "Why do ye such things?" said he; "for I hear of your evil doings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord's people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?"

Receiving only this mild reproof, Hophni and Phinehas "hearkened not unto the voice of their father." They did not, we are told, "because the Lord would slay them." The measure of their iniquity was full. They had, for a great while, been hardening their hearts against the strongest appeals of their own consciences, and the commands and the Spirit of God. They had been going on in a long course of sin, advancing from one degree of guilt to another, abusing the privileges of an early religious education, despising the repeated instructions and admonitions of their father, and breaking loose from all the restraints which not only the sacredness of the priestly office, but the common rules of decency ought to have imposed upon them. God determined to do nothing more to lead them to repentance. Thus abandoned to their own lusts, they persisted in their wickedness. Divine justice was now ready to overtake them in some one of its awful forms; and the too indulgent father, whose remissness in duty towards his children was of

the most gross and culpable nature, must be involved in the judgments which their mutual guilt deserved.

Tremble, impenitent and obdurate transgressor, lest, being abandoned of God, thou shalt soon, like the sons of Eli, cease to hearken to any remonstrance of conscience, of parents, or of friends, *because the Lord would slay thee*—would cut thee off for ever from his favor; overtake thee, sooner or later, with his judgments in this world, and in that to come consign thee to a miserable and hopeless despair!

Eli soon received a premonition of the calamities that awaited him and his family. A prophet was sent to him from the Lord with a solemn and fearful message. He was reminded of what God had done for his father's house, by conferring upon it, from Aaron downwards, the honors and privileges of the priesthood. Since he had failed to correct the abuses of his sons, and had probably partaken of the unlawful portions of the sacrifices which they forced from the people, he was reproved together with them for the profanation of these sacred ordinances. He was told, that on account of their mutual guilt, the office of high-priest should be removed from his family. This took place in the time of Solomon, who gave it to Zadok, of the line of Eleazar, Aaron's eldest son, after the destruction of Nadab and

Abihu—Eli being in the line of Ithamar, his next and fourth son.

The prophet further declared, that the power and influence of Eli's family should be destroyed; that a man of advanced years should not be found among his descendants, but that they should be cut off in the flower of their age; that he should see the tabernacle spoiled of its glory, the ark of the covenant being carried away by the Philistines, and they triumphing over the Israelites. Such of his posterity as were spared after the high-priest of Eleazar's line came into office, should find themselves destitute and despised, and be constrained to "come and crouch to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread." They should entreat to be employed, that they might earn their daily subsistence, in the lowest services that were performed by the priests. The sudden death of his two sons, on the same day, was to be the sign to him that the prophet was indeed a messenger from God, and that all these things would come to pass.

At the time when the events occurred which have been related, "the word of the Lord was precious—there was no open vision." There were no revelations of the divine will made by a publicly accredited prophet to whom the people could resort for guidance, and hence the occasional communications that were made to indi-

viduals were the more highly valued. Indeed, from the death of Moses we read of but two prophets, with the exception of Deborah, who is called a prophetess; and these withdrew after delivering particular messages, their very names not being mentioned. The first was sent to admonish the children of Israel when they were oppressed by the Midianites; the second was the one who has just been spoken of as addressing Eli. The young Samuel, as we shall see, was soon to be the next—the first of any distinction since Moses, and with whom prophecy was again openly established; there being, for several ages after him, prophets raised up in regular succession.

God has made to us a revelation of his will by an exalted personage of infinitely higher dignity than any of the prophets of old. He has spoken to us by his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, *the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person, and who thought it no robbery to be equal with God.* He comes to bring us glad tidings of great joy; to tell us that our sins can be pardoned, and ourselves restored to the divine favor, through his own atoning blood. He comes to be our prophet, priest, and king, that, putting ourselves under his instruction and guidance, and looking to him for wisdom, grace, and strength, we may carry on a successful

struggle with sin, and be fitted to enter those mansions of eternal blessedness whither he has gone to prepare a place for all his followers. He comes to invite us to the highest happiness of which we can participate in this world, to be united with him *in doing good*—in diffusing the light and the influence of his Gospel throughout the earth—in establishing in every heart the kingdom of righteousness, of peace, and of joy in the Holy Ghost.

Reader, do you receive this message with a cordial acceptance? Do you trust in this Saviour who brings it? Do you delight to honor him by devoting yourself to his service? Your eternal welfare is involved in the reply.

CHAPTER IV.

Samuel is called by the Lord, and delivers a divine message to Eli. He is established to be a prophet. The Israelites are defeated by the Philistines.

It would seem, that near the tabernacle at Shiloh there were pitched several smaller tents, in which the priests resided during the time of

their ministrations. One of these tents was appropriated to Eli. On a certain occasion he had retired to rest; the dimness of his eye-sight and the other infirmities of age reminding him that he needed repose at an early hour. Samuel, who was now, probably, about twelve years old, had also lain down to sleep in the same tent, and not far from Eli. The lamp of God was burning in the tabernacle. But before it went out, and while the day had not yet dawned, a strange occurrence took place. Samuel was awaked by some one calling him. "Here am I," he replied, and thinking it was Eli, immediately rose, and ran to his bed-side to inquire what he needed. Eli told him he was mistaken—that he had not called him—and directed him to lie down again.

Samuel did so; but, to his great astonishment, it was not long before he heard the same voice once more calling him by name. He was equally sure, as at first, that it must be Eli, and immediately went to him and said, "Here am I; for thou didst call me." "I called not, my son," was the reply; "lie down again."

It was the voice of God that addressed Samuel, though he was yet ignorant of this; it being the first time of his receiving any divine communication. It was repeated, and again he inquired of Eli the cause of his calling him. Eli now perceived that it was Jehovah himself who had

spoken, and he gave Samuel this injunction, expecting, no doubt, from these singular circumstances, some important message from the Lord. " Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, Lord ; for thy servant heareth."

Again Samuel lay down in his accustomed place ; and his name, twice repeated, was uttered by the mysterious voice. He replied as he had been directed, and the Lord thus spoke to his young servant : " Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day" (a certain time yet to come) " I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house : when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him, that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth : because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever." No sin offerings or oblations, however numerous and long continued, would be regarded as having any efficacy to avert from Eli, his family, and descendants, the judgments which had been denounced against them by the prophet that was sent to him from the Lord.

In the morning Samuel arose and proceeded

to open the doors of the sanctuary, and to perform his other customary duties. The affecting communication which he had received he kept to himself, not daring to divulge it to Eli, whom, he knew, it must overwhelm with sorrow. It was not long, however, before Eli called him. The anxious old man, dreading, probably, that it portended evil, could not rest satisfied till he had heard it, alarming as it might be. "What is the thing," he inquired eagerly, "that the Lord hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also,"—cause even greater judgments to fall upon thyself,—"if thou hide any thing from me, of all the things that he said unto thee."

This solemn adjuration had its intended effect. The youthful prophet, standing before the high-priest whom he venerated and loved, disclosed what had been revealed to him with an aching heart. What a trying scene to both. Conscious guilt prepared Eli to listen with the deepest self-abasement as he received the awful denunciation, while Samuel, shrinking back with a respectful modesty, reluctantly delivered it. It was told. Nothing was kept back; and the penitent Eli exclaimed, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." It was too late to avert, by any humiliation, the stroke that was to fall upon him; but it was not too late to profit by the expected

chastisement in the cultivation of that temper of soul which became his situation, and this he appears to have done.

Some years passed away after this event without any thing striking that is noticed in the sacred record. Samuel was gradually approaching manhood ; *the Lord being with him*, teaching him by the influences of his Spirit, and leading him to make constant progress in wisdom and goodness. He received, too, from time to time, other divine communications in the way of prophetic announcement to the Israelites, and God always honored him by causing their exact fulfilment to take place. Thus all his countrymen, throughout the length and breadth of the land, knew that he was *established* as a prophet of the Lord ; not an occasional messenger from the Most High, but sustaining an official and abiding character in that respect. It was a high honor for so young a man ; and shows the peculiar regard with which Jehovah viewed him. Happy results, under the divine blessing, of the prayers and efforts of his pious parents ; of their consecrating him, while yet an infant, to the Lord ; and especially of what *his mother* did in these respects. What cannot mothers like Hannah do for their children ! What will not such faith accomplish !

Samuel was now, it is supposed, about twenty years of age, continuing as a prophet to make

known the will of God to the people, so that *his word* in this respect, we are told, *came to all Israel*. On one important occasion, however, deeply involving the interests of the nation, it would seem that they acted without his counsel. At any rate no mention is made of their seeking it; and we have reason to think, from the circumstances of the case, that if he acted at all in the affair it must have been in opposition to the general movement.

The Israelites went out to war against the Philistines. The immediate cause of this does not appear. It was, doubtless, to avenge some real or supposed wrong which the latter had inflicted upon them, and which they meant to redress in this way. The result shows, however, that they did not act in the fear of God, and in obedience to his commands. They neglected altogether to seek his direction in the enterprise, and for this and their general wickedness he left them a prey to their enemies.

The Israelites collected their forces at a place which was afterwards called *Ebenezer*, or "the Stone of Help," the reason of which epithet we shall see as we advance in the narrative. The Philistines encamped at Aphek, in the tribe of Issachar, a place in the neighborhood of the former one, and not far from the celebrated city of Jezreel. A battle soon ensued in which the

Philistines gained a complete victory, putting to death about four thousand of the Israelites. When those who escaped had returned to the camp, a council of the elders, or leading men, was held to inquire why it was that the Lord had thus suffered them to be defeated. They seem not to have considered that it was owing to their great sinfulness and that of the people. They did not seek deliverance in the only sure way, by humbling themselves before God ; imploring his forgiveness ; and beseeching him to rescue them not only from the Philistines, but from what had brought down his judgments upon them, their multiplied and grievous transgressions.

They had too much pride and self-sufficiency to do this. And yet they dared not again to rely wholly on their own strength. They would, in some way, bring to their aid the interposition of the almighty arm ; but in a way of their own devising, and what they deemed an easy and expeditious way. It was simply to send for the ark of the covenant from Shiloh. Its presence, they thought, among them would ensure a victory over the Philistines. It would strike the latter with terror. It would inspire the Israelites with an invincible courage ; and surely while they rallied round it, and fought to defend it from profanation, God would not suffer it to fall into the hands of his and their enemies.

Such, still, are the devices of the sinful heart. When alarmed by impending danger, or the fears of a future judgment, the wicked will do any thing for security rather than go to God with a humble penitence, and cast themselves on his mercy through a crucified Redeemer. Some external doings of their own, or even some formal act of religious worship, they flatter themselves will be sufficient, and supply the want of repentance and faith. In this way they hope to have the protecting presence of God—not the presence of his Holy Spirit, to save them from the worst of all evils, their own corruption and sinfulness—not the presence of the Saviour, to lead them to victory over the powers of darkness—but simply the interposition of divine power in their behalf, to avert the temporal or eternal dangers which they dread. In such a state they can expect no deliverance. They can plead no promise of God to that effect. They have none on which to rely.

CHAPTER V.

The ark is brought to the camp of the Israelites. They are again defeated. Hophni and Phinehas are slain. Death of Eli. The ark is taken by the Philistines.

In accordance with the counsel of the elders, an embassy was forthwith sent from the camp of the Israelites to Shiloh, to bring back with them the ark of the covenant. The expectations of the people were greatly raised by this movement. They called to mind the success that had attended the arms of their fathers in their wars with the Canaanites when they carried the ark of God with them, as in the case of the destruction of Jericho, and, also, their defeat when they omitted to do it. Its merely being in their midst, they seemed to think, would produce a miraculous interposition in their favor; forgetting that it was only symbolical of the divine, protecting presence, and that the latter depended upon their loyalty to God, and their acting in obedience to his commands.

Hophni and Phinehas, the wicked sons of Eli, had the more immediate charge of the ark at Shiloh. On application being made for it, without any divine direction to let it go, and probably without even consulting their father, the high priest, it would seem that they impiously entered

the holy of holies, and bearing out the ark, suffered it to be carried off to the camp of the Israelites, themselves accompanying it. It was received with joyful acclamations. "The earth rang again" with the shouts of the people; so sure were they of victory when they should once more give battle to the Philistines. The sighs and tears of penitence would have much better become them, and a deep and universal humbling of themselves before God, rather than this vain and self-confident exultation.

The Philistines heard the shouting, and were curious to know the cause. In some way they soon learned it. At first a great fear overwhelmed them. They exclaimed, "God is come into the camp. Wo unto us! for there hath not been such a thing heretofore. Wo unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods? these are the Gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness." But recovering in some degree from their alarm, their leaders endeavored to rally the courage of the soldiers, and before leading them on to battle, addressed them in the following manner; "Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you: quit yourselves like men, and fight."

A second engagement ensued, in which the Israelites were completely routed, and thirty thou-

sand footmen slain. Hophni and Phinehas were among the number. What added to the dismay of such of them as escaped, was, that the ark of God was taken, and carried off by the Philistines. One of the survivors, a soldier of the tribe of Benjamin, ran with all possible speed to Shiloh, to convey the melancholy intelligence, his clothes being rent, and earth upon his head, as signs of grief and humiliation. As he approached the place, Eli was seated near the way-side, anxiously waiting the first news that might arrive of the battle. He longed to know the fate of his countrymen and of his two sons. But this solicitude, if possible, yielded to one deeper and more intense emotion. *His heart trembled for the ark of God.*

It does not appear that he had been consulted with regard to its removal. He may have strongly protested against it; and he must have well known the danger which the Israelites, in this and various other ways, were incurring by their transgressions, of exposing themselves to the judgments of God. What judgment of his upon the nation could be greater, than to suffer the symbol of his presence and protection to fall into the hands of their enemies.

The arrival of the messenger and the news which he brought, produced, as might be expected, a great sensation throughout the city. Crowds assembled to hear him. Sorrow spread from heart

to heart, and lamentations filled the air. Eli *saw* nothing of the general commotion. To his other infirmities was added that of blindness, he being now ninety-eight years of age. But he heard the noise of the people, and inquired into the cause. At this time the messenger himself came hastily to tell him. "I am he," said he, "that came out of the army, and I fled to-day out of the army."

"What is there done, my son?" eagerly asked Eli.

"Israel is fled before the Philistines," was the reply, "and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken."

The defeat of his countrymen—the carnage that ensued—even the death of his two sons, Eli could hear with some degree of self-control; but when he was told that the ark of the covenant, for which his heart had trembled, was in the possession of the Philistines, it was too much for him to endure. In a sudden agony of grief the remaining powers of nature sunk beneath the stroke; and falling backwards from his seat in a swoon, being a large and heavy man, his neck brake, and he died.

While we lament the errors and sins of Eli, and especially his sad deficiency in duty with regard to his two sons, and recognize the awful se-

verity of the divine justice which overtook both him and them, let us admire, also, the devoted attachment of this venerable high priest to the honor of God, and to the interests of religion, in the closing scene of his life. *His heart trembled for the ark.* Its loss was the immediate cause of his death. And this affecting exhibition of his loyalty to Jehovah, the God of his people, furnishes satisfactory evidence that such was his prevailing disposition, and that though a very imperfect, he was, through divine grace, a truly pious man. He had been judge in Israel twenty years.

But the death of Eli was not the only tragical event which marked, at Shiloh, the reception of the afflicting intelligence of the Israelites' defeat, and the capture of the ark. When the wife of Phinehas heard of it, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she also was brought to a premature and painful death. Overwhelmed with sorrow, and yielding up her spirit, she gave birth in her parting moments to a son. On being told of this, it seemed to have no effect upon her maternal feelings ; so absorbed was her mind with things of vastly deeper import. She gave a name, however, before she died, to the child, calling it *Ichabod*, which means *where is the glory?* and adding, "The glory is departed from Israel : for the ark of God is taken."

The Philistines were highly elated with the

victory they had achieved; yet they were restrained from destroying, or even injuring the ark of the covenant. Probably they regarded it with a superstitious reverence on the one hand, and on the other, while it should remain in their possession, as a standing and triumphant proof of their superiority over the Israelites. At any rate, whatever were their motives, it was preserved inviolate, and carried to Ashdod, one of their principal cities. This place was a sea-port on the Mediterranean, westward of Jerusalem, in which stood the temple of Dagon, the idol of the Philistines.

Here they placed the ark close by the god that they worshipped, as an offering to him for the aid he had afforded them, and a trophy to prove how much more powerful he was than the God of their enemies. A signal interposition of Jehovah showed how vain was their boasting. On the morrow, as the people entered the temple early in the morning to perform some of their usual acts of idolatrous worship, what was their surprise and consternation to find that the idol had fallen prostrate on his face before the ark of the Lord; that the head and hands were broken off upon the threshold; and that only the unsightly stump, supposed to have resembled the lower half of a fish, was left remaining. Whether they united the broken fragments and re-

stored the idol to its place, or procured a new one to be made, we are not told. But they continued still to worship it, in spite of the disgrace which the true God had inflicted upon it in this miraculous way ; and so deep-seated was their superstition, that from that day, whenever the priests or any other persons came into the temple, they avoided treading on the threshold where their god had suffered the injury.

How great is the infatuation of sin ! It not only pollutes and degrades the soul, but shuts out from it the light of divine truth. The Philistines most foolishly, as well as wickedly, persisted in their idolatry, when the evidence of its folly, and of the superiority of Jehovah, the God of the Israelites, was placed before them in so striking, and it would seem to us convincing a manner.

Reader, hast *thou* no idol which a little reflection ought to teach thee thy own hand should prostrate in the dust before the God of the Bible, to whom thou owest the entire homage of thy heart ? And when thy idols have fallen, as they often have, and disappointment and wretchedness overwhelmed thee in suffering them to rule thy affections, hast thou not too often replaced them on their usurped elevation, and bowed down to them as before ? Sad proof of the power of sin within thee ! *Nothing but divine grace will subdue it.*

CHAPTER VI.

Judgments come upon the Philistines. They send back the ark.

Judgments had fallen upon the Israelites, and now they came with great severity upon the Philistines. "The hand of the Lord," we are told, "was heavy upon them of Ashdod." He destroyed multitudes of the people of that city and of the neighboring regions with a deadly pestilence, and afflicted numbers of others with a loathsome and very excruciating disease, called in our English version of the Scriptures *emerods*. This was done not only as a punishment justly due to their heinous wickedness, but to reprove them for their perverseness in continuing to worship Dagon after the proof of his nothingness, and for detaining the ark in captivity, as if in triumph over the God of the Israelites.

The men of Ashdod seem to have understood what was the principal cause of their calamities. The general cry was, "The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us: for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god." They immediately gathered a council of the chief men of the Philistines, and inquired of them what

should be done with the ark. The decision was, that it should be carried to Gath, another of their principal cities, and at no great distance south of Ashdod. They hoped, at least, in this way to avert the vengeance of Jehovah from themselves; and they probably had such imperfect notions of his character as to suppose that, like their own gods, his jurisdiction was confined within certain limits, and would not reach this new place of the ark's residence.

But they found themselves mistaken. A similar destruction and disease to what took place at Ashdod, visited the inhabitants of Gath as soon as the ark had arrived in that city. They, too, in their turn, sought deliverance from their calamity, by sending the cause of it from among them. The ark was transported to Ekron, the most northern city of the Philistines, to the great dismay of the people there, who by this time well knew the judgments that must await them. Soon these judgments appeared in the same forms as in the other places, and were so extensive and terrible that "the cry of the city went up to heaven."

Again the lords of the Philistines were assembled, and the inhabitants of Gath intreated them to send back the ark to Shiloh; for nothing short of this, they thought, would rescue the whole country from destruction. Seven months had

elapsed since it had been retained by the Philistines ; a sufficient length of time for them to discover, as they had fearfully done, that there was no other prospect before them, if they did not restore it, but the endurance of the vengeance of that God to whom it belonged.

The rulers seem to have yielded to these intreaties, but hesitated with regard to the manner of sending back the ark. Ought it not to be done with some suitable religious ceremonies, to propitiate the favor of the Deity whom they had offended ? Who shall advise in an affair of so much moment ? Who but those who served their own gods, and officiated at their altars ? The priests and the diviners were sent for. The inquiry was proposed to them ; "What shall we do to the ark of the Lord ? tell us wherewith we shall send it to his place."

" If ye send away the ark of the God of Israel," was the reply, " send it not empty ; but in any wise return him a trespass-offering ; then ye shall be healed, and it shall be known to you why his hand is not removed from you." The result, if a favorable one, would lead them to believe that it was for neglecting to do what their priests suggested that their sufferings had so long continued.

The trespass-offering, according to the directions of the priests and diviners, was to consist

of five golden emerods, and five golden mice, corresponding to the number of the lords of the Philistines; the former being, probably, an image of the diseased parts of their bodies which had been so strangely and painfully affected, and the latter of the little animals which had overrun their fields and committed a terrible devastation.* Thus they would, ostensibly at least, acknowledge that the afflictions which they had endured came from the hand of the offended God of the Hebrews, and deprecate the continuance of his displeasure. "Ye shall give glory," said the priests and the diviners, "unto the God of Israel: peradventure he will lighten his hand from off you, and from off your gods, and from off your land." It would seem, however, that there was

* It was a very ancient usage, when a plague or other calamity infested a country, city, &c. for the magicians to form an *image* of the *destroyer*, or of the things on which the plague particularly rested, in gold, silver, ivory, wax, clay, &c. under certain configurations of the heavens; and to set this up in some proper place, that the evils thus represented might be driven away. These consecrated images were the same that are called *talismans*, or rather *telesms*, among the Asiatics. Something like what is mentioned in the Bible is practised among the inhabitants of India; for when a pilgrim goes to one of the idol temples for a cure, he brings the *figure* of the *member* affected, made either of gold, silver, or copper, according to his circumstances, which he offers to his god.

still a great reluctance to part with the ark; for we find them immediately adding, "Wherefore then do ye harden your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? when he had wrought wonderfully among them, did they not let the people go, and they departed?"

They insisted upon the necessity of delaying no longer, saying, "Now therefore make a new cart," (one that had never been used for any common purpose,) "and take two milch kine, on which there hath come no yoke, and tie the kine to the cart, and bring their calves home from them: And take the ark of the Lord and lay it upon the cart; and put the jewels of gold," (the golden images of the emerods and the mice,) "which ye return him for a trespass-offering, in a coffer by the side thereof: and send it away that it may go. And see, if it goeth up by the way of his own coast to Beth-shemesh, then he hath done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us; it was a chance that happened to us." The proof, in this way, would be decisive. Without a supernatural influence, the kine would not voluntarily leave their calves, nor take the right road towards Beth-shemesh in a direction in which they had never yet gone.

The necessary preparations were made. The ark of the Lord, with the accompanying offering,

was placed on the new vehicle, and the kine that had never been yoked before, being attached to it, were left to move forward without any human guidance or control. To the astonishment of the assembled multitude, they soon found their way into the great road which led to Beth-shemesh, and continuing their course, lowing as they went, avoided every other road, on the right hand or the left, which would mislead them.

At length they approached the place of their destination, a city in the tribe of Judah belonging to the Levites, about thirty miles north-west of Jerusalem,—the lords of the Philistines following after, that they might be fully satisfied of the result. It was the season of wheat-harvest, and the men of Beth-shemesh were reaping in the adjacent valley, when the strange spectacle met their eyes. They soon recognized the ark, and were filled with surprise and joy at its return. The kine that drew it moved onward, till they came into the field of an individual whose name was Joshua. Here they quietly stopped near a huge stone, called *the stone of Abel, or weeping*, and which was still remaining when the Book of Samuel, that records these events, was written.

On this stone some Levites who were present, and to whom pertained the service of the tabernacle, carefully placed the ark and the coffer

which accompanied it. They, then, clave the cart to be used as fuel on the occasion, and sacrificed the two kine as a burnt-offering ; while the men of Beth-shemesh held a devout, religious festival to express their gratitude for the safe reception of the ark among them, offering up burnt-offerings and sacrifices unto the Lord. The five lords of the Philistines, after having beheld these scenes at a distance, returned to Ekron, bearing a message to their countrymen well adapted, as we should think, to inspire them with a reverential dread of the God of Israel.

It was, indeed, an abundant cause of heart-felt rejoicing, that the symbol of Jehovah's presence among his people had returned after so long an absence. What true Israelite but must have regarded it as such, and felt the most grateful emotions enkindled in his breast ! And so will every sincere follower of Christ feel, as he gladly welcomes to his soul that renewed communion with his God, that cheering light of his countenance and indwelling of the Spirit of grace, of which his sinful departure from duty may have, for a season, deprived him. He, too, will offer up the oblations of penitential thankfulness, the sacrifices of a broken heart and of a contrite spirit.

My young friend, is the ark of the covenant with you ? Do you enjoy the spiritual presence

of God, of which this was, of old, the symbol? Has it *never* dwelt with you; or, if it once has, have you now to *lament its absence*? In either case, rest not till you welcome it to the temple of your heart.

CHAPTER VII.

The fate of those who too curiously looked into the ark. It is stationed at Kirjath-jearim. Samuel reproves the people. Their reformation, and assembling at Mizpah.

It was strictly forbidden to the Israelites to look into the ark of the covenant. During their journeyings in the wilderness, whenever they removed from one station to another, it was covered, together with the holy things belonging to the tabernacle, not only to conceal them from sight, but that the touch, even, of the sons of Kohath, who were appointed to bear them, should not profane what was regarded as sacred to the Lord. Should they do this, death was to be the inevitable result. In the tabernacle the ark was placed within the vail, and the high priest himself might not look

upon it but once a year, and then through a cloud of incense. The men of Beth-shemesh were well aware of this; and yet some of them had the presumption to gratify their unhallowed curiosity by removing the covering from the ark and examining the inside of it. They suffered severely for such a flagrant act of impiety. Our version of the Scriptures says that fifty thousand and seventy perished in consequence, and probably on the spot.

The lamentations on this occasion were deep and universal. Terror pervaded every breast. "Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?" they exclaimed, "and to whom shall he go up from us?" They trembled at the continuance of the ark among them, as the symbol of his presence, lest possibly still more fearful judgments might overtake them. Messengers were immediately despatched to Kirjath-jearim, a place not far distant, and about nine miles west of Jerusalem, to inform the inhabitants that the Philistines had brought the ark to Beth-shemesh, and to request them to come and remove it to their city. They said nothing, it would seem, of the terrible calamity that had befallen them; and we are not informed what the reasons were which they assigned for the course which they proposed. In pursuing it, however, they left to succeeding generations the most severe condemnation of

their own conduct. The providence of God had highly honored them by causing the ark, on its return to the Israelites, to come first to Beth-she-mesh as the place of its location. Surely it was a very distinguished privilege for them to enjoy, and they ought to have valued it as such. But they profaned this sacred residence of Jehovah. They sinned grievously against him ; and after doing it, instead of humbling themselves before him and imploring his forgiveness, their first impulse was to get rid of the visible manifestation of his presence,—to have it removed from among them, lest it should continue to reprove and chastise them for their sins.

And such is always the course of those who offend against God, and feel no penitence for their transgressions. A sense of the divine presence becomes intolerable to them, and they resort to any expedient to banish it from their minds. If we find ourselves thus desiring to have God, as it were, removed far from us, it furnishes the saddest and most satisfactory evidence of our guilt, and of the alarming danger of our state.

The inhabitants of Kirjath-jearim rejoiced at the proposal which was made to them. They immediately deputed the most suitable persons to go, as a solemn embassy, after the ark ; who, returning with it, placed it in the house of Abinadab, and his son Eleazar was set apart with religious so-

lemnities to take charge of it. There it continued twenty years at least, and probably longer.*

In the meanwhile, indications appeared of a great and extensive reformation among the Israel-

* During this period, Saul ordered Abijah the high priest to bring it to his camp in Gibeah, after which it was returned again to the house of Abinadab. When David was king, and had gotten full possession of Jerusalem, he made an attempt to bring the ark thither, but was discouraged by an example of the divine vengeance upon one of the sons of Abinadab, who unadvisedly laid his hands upon it; on which account David left it at the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. With Obed-Edom the ark remained three months, after which it was brought with great solemnity into that part of Jerusalem called the city of David, where a place was prepared and a tent pitched for it, and there it remained till it was put into the temple afterwards built by Solomon, upon which occasion it appears that the 132d Psalm was composed. From the temple of Solomon it was afterwards removed, probably by one of the idolatrous kings of Judah, for we find the pious king Josiah ordering it to be replaced. It is supposed to have been consumed in the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, which took place not many years afterwards.

With regard to the tabernacle and the other sacred things belonging to it, we read that in the days of Saul it had been removed from Shiloh to Nob, a city on this side of the Jordan, between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, not far from the city of Jerusalem, which had been assigned to the priests and Levites for their habitation, among whom Abimelech and his son Abiathar were successively high priests. In the reign of David it was at Gibeon, in the tribe of Benjamin; probably because Saul had commanded Doeg to assassinate

ites. It is said, that they "lamented after the Lord." They seem to have felt, in some degree, the extent of their sinfulness, and that in consequence of it Jehovah had forsaken them. They supplicated his forgiveness, and his return among them with the cheering tokens of his presence and favor. Doubtless their grief arose, in part, from the reflection that it was owing to their ingratitude and disobedience, that the ark of the covenant had been detained so long by the Philistines, and that though at length brought back, it had not yet been restored to its proper place in the tabernacle at Shiloh; and in this respect, also "they lamented after the Lord."

It is most probable that this promising state of things arose from the faithful and assiduous labors of Samuel among his countrymen. He had some time since attained the age of manhood, and in addition to his official character as an established prophet of the Lord, was a judge over the Israelites; their highest civil magistrate under Jehovah, the great Head of the nation. Acting in this double capacity, his counsels, his examples, and his authority must have

all the priests at Nob: which sanguinary commission he executed so sucessfully, that Abiathar alone escaped to David. Here, also, it was at the commencement of Solomon's reign, after which time the Scriptures are silent about it.---Horne.

had great weight. He urged upon the people the need of a sincere repentance for their sins, and of returning to their duty. Nor were his efforts in vain, as we have seen. Throughout the whole land the hearts of men appeared to be prepared for the entire abandonment of idolatry and their other evil practices, and a cheerful obedience to the divine commands.

"If ye do return unto the Lord," said Samuel, "with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hands of the Philistines."

They did so. They destroyed the images of the false gods, their altars, and their groves; and worshipped and served Jehovah alone. Samuel's faith took strong hold of the divine promises. He felt assured that the rescue of his countrymen from the oppression of their enemies which they had so long endured, was near at hand. He issued orders for a general assembly of the people at Mizpeh, a city of Judah south of Jerusalem, encouraging them with the promise that he would pray for them unto the Lord, as a mediator at the throne of grace.

His summons was soon obeyed. An immense concourse from the various tribes came together. Religious solemnities were instituted under the

direction of Samuel. Among other ceremonies was the pouring out of water, in such a way, probably, as to be emblematical of *the pouring out of their hearts* in penitential sorrow, and cries, and tears before the Lord. They fasted, too, and practised the deepest humiliation, confessing their sins and imploring forgiveness. At the same time, as their judge, or ruler, Samuel heard and settled any difficulties that existed among them; gave them such ordinances as their peculiar circumstances rendered necessary; and taught them more fully and clearly the course of duty which they ought to pursue.

Such a happy change among his countrymen must have been matter of great joy to this servant of the Lord. He had long been praying and striving to effect it, doubtless in the midst of discouragements which put his faith to the severest trials. Few, perhaps, if any, were ready, at first, to co-operate with him in this arduous undertaking: the deliverance of a whole nation from the practice and curse of idolatry and its ever-accompanying pollutions. But he was strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. He knew the peculiar duty that *he had to perform*, and resolutely persevered in it. We have seen the result.

What may not *one* faithful servant of God accomplish; *one Samuel* among a wicked and de-

generate people! What solemn responsibilities rest, in view of his example, on *individual* christians even when standing alone on the Lord's side! Why should they despond, or relax their efforts in the cause of their Master, when they call to mind what Samuel, under the divine blessing, achieved?

CHAPTER VIII.

The Philistines are defeated. Samuel erects a memorial of this. He acts as judge. The wickedness of his sons.

Intelligence of the great assembling at Mizpeh soon reached the ears of the Philistines. They considered it ominous of some hostile movement against them, to anticipate which they began immediately to collect their forces for an attack upon the Israelites. The latter hearing of this were filled with dread, and besought Samuel to cease not to cry unto the Lord their God, that he would deliver them out of the hand of their enemies.

With such feelings of dependence on the Most High, we may expect to find that the aid

which they invoked would not be refused. Samuel, too, was on this account encouraged to ask for it. He came before the Lord with a young lamb as a burnt-offering; and poured forth his devout supplications in behalf of his countrymen. He did not pray in vain. It was *the effectual, fervent prayer of the righteous man, which availeth much.* It was heard and answered. Ere the sacrifice was finished, the Philistines were seen approaching to give battle to the Israelites. It was a moment of awful interest to the latter; for the crisis of their fate was at hand. Another voice than that of Samuel in prayer is heard; the voice of the Almighty in the heavens. Peals of thunder roll terribly through the skies over the heads of the Philistines. Vivid lightnings flash around them and in their midst, killing numbers—filling all with the deepest consternation—and throwing their ranks into utter and irrecoverable confusion. The Israelites see the arm of Jehovah out-stretched for their succor. They are encouraged, on their part, to become the assailants. They leave the camp. They rush forward upon the enemy with a sure hope of victory. They soon obtain it. The Philistines are routed, and flee before them. They pursue such as escape the edge of the sword, vast numbers falling beneath it, till they come to Beth-car, a city in the tribe of Dan.

It may well be conceived, that joy and gratitude filled the breasts of the victors. They not only raised their united thanksgivings to God for his striking interposition in their behalf, but would leave, also, some lasting memorial of his goodness with which to animate their own future recollections of it, and to preserve its remembrance among their posterity. On their return to Mizpeh, Samuel caused a stone to be set up for this purpose, probably with a suitable inscription, to which he gave the name of Eben-ezer, or "the Stone of Help;" saying "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." It was on the same spot where, not many years before, as we have seen, the Israelites had encamped when they went out to war against the Philistines. Then they suffered a tremendous defeat, soon followed by a still more dreadful one; in which the ark of God was carried off in triumph by the enemy. For *then* they were sinning against God in a very bold and presumptuous manner, and dared to hope for his protecting presence by causing the symbol of it to be brought among them, when they had not the least right to expect his aid.

Now, in what different and highly propitious circumstances did they find themselves, as they re-trod the soil of the same place on their march homeward from a complete triumph over their enemies! What lessons of wisdom ought they

not to learn from such strongly contrasted events; what solemn warnings against future defection from the service of the only true God; what affecting proofs of his mercy and long-suffering towards them; and what new incentives to the exercise of an unshaken confidence in his watchful care, if they would but continue faithful in their allegiance.

It was, indeed, a most appropriate spot for the erection of the memorial,—“the Stone of Help,”—which Samuel, in the name of the nation, set up. They and their descendants might well look upon it, ever afterwards, with emotions of the deepest gratitude.

How many such spots, my dear reader, are there in the past course of your earthly pilgrimage, where you have had reason to erect similar memorials, and to say with devout thankfulness, “Hitherto hath the Lord helped me!”

The victory which God enabled the Israelites to achieve over their enemies was a most important one. It not only delivered them from the oppression under which they groaned at the time, but produced in the minds of the Philistines such impressions of their strength, and of the protecting power of the Almighty in their behalf, that the former made no more hostile attempts against the Israelites during the whole subsequent portion of Samuel’s life. The cities, too, which they

had taken from the latter, lying between Ekron and Gath, were restored; and the remaining Canaanites who were still left in Israel, seeing such a powerful people as the Philistines subdued, dared not do any thing to disturb the general peace which prevailed.

Such was the prosperous state of things under the rule of Samuel, who, we are told "judged Israel all the days of his life; performing, probably, many of the duties of this office even after Saul had become king, and especially in the region where he dwelt. That justice might be administered promptly and impartially, he had his regular, yearly circuits throughout the land, stopping at such of the principal cities as would the best enable him to accomplish this object. These were Beth-el, Gilgal, and Mizpeh; while his home was at Ramah, which he also made one of the seats of his official authority. There, probably, the people came to take counsel of him as a prophet of the Lord. There he built an altar, doubtless by the divine direction, where the customary sacrifices could be offered up, and the public worship of God maintained; the tabernacle being deprived of its glory, (the ark of the covenant,) and the service of the sanctuary at Shiloh, as we have much reason to believe, either suspended or greatly neglected.

Thus the youth, the manhood, and the declin-

ing years of this distinguished individual, fulfilled the promise of his early piety. What must have been the heart-felt satisfaction of his parents, who had dedicated him when an infant to the service of Jehovah, to witness, while they lived, these fruits of their faith and prayers. How great must have been the privileges of the Israelites, to have both their temporal and spiritual affairs conducted, under God, by one possessing such piety, wisdom, integrity, and firmness, and enjoying in a peculiar degree, the divine favor and blessing.

But Samuel had his trials, and those of the severest kind. His sons, Joel and Abiah, were the cause of this. We are not told, as in the case of Eli, that he had at all neglected to discharge his duty towards them. On the contrary, there can be but little doubt that by his instructions, his example, and the faithful exercise of parental authority, in connection with his prayers for the divine blessing, he had endeavored to bring them up in the fear of the Lord, and in obedience to his commands. Perhaps, while under the more immediate control of their father they maintained a good degree of outward, exemplary conduct; and he fondly hoped that their hearts might be right with God. But as they advanced in years, and were removed from his observation and control, they seem to have exhibited far different traits of character.

Confiding in their uprightness, Samuel, who was now old, and desirous, probably, of some relief in the performance of his official duties, appointed them judges, or subordinate rulers, in Beer-sheba and the surrounding territory. This was quite in the southern part of Canaan, and at a considerable distance from his residence, and from the districts in which he administered justice. Thus removed from the influence of his example, and the restraints with which they had hitherto felt themselves surrounded, they yielded to the temptations which beset them, and gave scope to their own selfish and sinful propensities. Money was their idol and their ruin. They proved themselves unworthy sons of so excellent a father. "They walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment."

What grief they were preparing to inflict upon their venerable parent! How deep must have been their ingratitude to make such a return for all his kindness.

Little do children and youth know the pangs that their parents have to endure, when they witness their misconduct, or when the news of it reaches their ears. The gray hairs of many a one, on this account, have been brought down with sorrow to the grave. My young friend, can you find it in your heart to be thus cruel to the

tender mother and the watchful father who have done so much for you? Pray to be delivered from a sin so base and heinous.

CHAPTER IX.

The people complain to Samuel, and desire a king. The Lord directs him to comply with their request.

The iniquitous conduct of the two sons of Samuel in the discharge of their official duties, rendered them very obnoxious to the people. Complaints spread on every side. Many murmured against Samuel himself, charging him with an undue partiality towards Joel and Abiah, whom he ought to have known better than to place in such responsible stations. Some began to speak of him as already too far advanced in years to act with suitable dignity and spirit as the ruler of so numerous a people. The opinion, too, was gaining ground that, to maintain their rank among the surrounding nations, they should have placed over them a magistrate of more power and splendor than the judges had been; and that nothing but the majesty of a sovereign

prince would meet their necessities, and comport with their increasing strength and greatness.

These discontented and ambitious feelings became general, for the Israelites were prepared to indulge them by the decline of their piety; by the increase of a worldly spirit; and by a foolish and wicked admiration of what they conceived to be the more elevated condition of the Canaanites who were governed by kings. What a miserable delusion! What sinful ingratitude! Jehovah himself was the Monarch of their nation; the King of kings and Lord of lords; the Supreme Majesty of heaven and earth. What nation, before or since, has ever enjoyed so high an honor? What people, it may be asked, have ever proved themselves so unworthy of it?

The elders of Israel, instructed no doubt by the people, assembled as the representatives of the tribes, and came in a body to Samuel at Ramah. We should suppose that they would do this to state respectfully the grievances which they endured under the wicked administration of his sons, or in any other ways that needed redress, and, at the same time, to acknowledge, what was undoubtedly the fact, the uprightness and success of his rule over them, and their gratitude to God for the blessings which it had shed around on every side.

But they came with other feelings, and had a

far different object to accomplish. "Behold," said they to Samuel, "thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations."

Their request displeased him greatly. Not that he would resent the insinuation, that age was beginning to disqualify him for the exercise of authority, however unfounded it might be; nor decline taking efficient measures to remedy the evils that existed under the government of his sons; but because he saw the melancholy evidence of the apostasy of the whole nation in the desire to have a king, made known to him through the elders. This, for the moment, engrossed his thoughts, and overwhelmed him with perplexity and sorrow. He endeavored to obtain relief where he had often found it in such extremities. He poured forth his supplications to God, and besought his guidance. What, doubtless, was his surprise and grief to receive in reply this divine communication. "Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. Now therefore hearken un-

to their voice: howbeit, yet protest solemnly unto them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them."

The crisis had come. God in his justice was about to leave the Israelites to reap the fruits of their defection, and of their discontent at his immediate government over them. Still, he meant that they should have their wishes gratified of their own free choice, and with a distinct view of the tremendous evils to which the course they were about to take would expose them. If they were bent on having a king, they should know beforehand the consequences of so disastrous a change.

The elders were assembled, and Samuel laid before them the message which he had received. "This," said he, "will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your olive-yards, even the best of them, and give them to his ser-

vants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your men-servants, and your maid-servants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep : and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen over you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day."

Such would be their king ; such his despotic sway over them—the severe exactions which he would make, and from which they would not be able to escape. They would, at length, groan under the pressure of his tyranny, and, repenting of their choice, beseech the interposition of the Almighty in their behalf. But in vain. He would turn a deaf ear to their entreaties, and leave them to abide the consequences of their folly.

In view of this, can they madly persist in their course, and draw down evils of such magnitude upon themselves and their posterity ? Will not the counsels of the wise and venerable Samuel prevail, especially when he gives them in the name of the Lord ? No, the passions of men are stronger than their reason. "The people refused to obey the voice of Samuel ; and they said, Nay ; but we will have a king over us ; that we also may be like all the nations ; and that our

king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles."

Samuel again sought divine direction, and was told to comply with the request of the elders. He informed them of this, and leaving the selection of their king in his hands, they returned, as he ordered them to do, every man unto his own city.

As we calmly look at these events after the long lapse of years that has rolled by since their occurrence, being free from any personal interest in them, we may wonder at the blind infatuation of the Israelites, and the wicked obstinacy of their hearts. How was it possible for them, we may ask, thus to desire to have Jehovah cease to reign over them, and to come under the dominion of an earthly monarch who, they were assured, would cause them bitterly to lament the change? How could they disregard such solemn warnings as they received, and reject the counsels both of God and his prophet?

"As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man." Do not men now show the same spirit? When worldly and ambitious desires rule their breasts, do they not strive to break loose from the authority of God; and are they not ready, in view of some fancied good, to become the slaves of sin, and to submit to its tyrannical rule over them? Reader, has this never

been thy own case ? Hast thou not felt the restraints of the divine law to be irksome ; and striven to be emancipated from them ; and been willing to serve the world, the flesh, and the adversary of thy soul ? And hast thou not done this, in spite of the warnings of conscience, of the Word of God, and of his Spirit, and *knowing*, by thy own observation and experience, what the consequences must be ?

Wonder not at the Israelites of old who desired of Samuel a king. Wonder rather at thy own folly and guilt, thou who enjoyest so many more privileges, and so much greater light than they did ! Repent of such a course whenever thou hast taken it. Repent of it now, if thou art pursuing it, or art tempted to pursue it. Return to thy allegiance to Jehovah. Acknowledge him *in thy heart* as thy rightful sovereign, and covenant Lord. Yield him thy loyal love and obedience. Let no idols of thy worldly and sinful affections usurp his rightful dominion over thee. His service is perfect freedom ; his favor inconceivable blessedness.

CHAPTER X.

Saul's parentage. He is sent to seek the lost asses of his father. He goes to inquire of Samuel, and meets him.

The elders returning to their respective cities, communicated to the people at large the result of their interview with Samuel. The great decision was made. The Israelites were to have a king. Soon, in this respect, as they fondly imagined, the dignity and splendor of their nation would be sustained in view of their heathen neighbors ; and the latter would thus be impressed with an increased dread of making any hostile attacks upon them. We may well conceive that as the news spread from city to city, and from tribe to tribe, a general feeling of exultation prevailed, accompanied by an eager curiosity to know who would be the distinguished individual that should wear the crown.

He is ready to appear. The eye of God has marked him for this purpose. His character has been maturing for the destiny which he is to fulfil. When the Almighty has designs to carry into effect, the agents by which they are to be accomplished are always at hand—*voluntary agents*, too, whose selfish and sinful desires, in many

cases, are permitted to exist, and are over-ruled by divine Providence to aid in consummating his plans ; while the selfishness and the sin that take place, are *all their own*. Mysterious combination of the perfectly holy agency of God, and the guilty agency of man ; to us, in some of its aspects, inscrutable ; while both reason and revelation teach us that it must and does take place !

Among the Benjamites, in the city of Gibeah, a few miles north of Jerusalem, dwelt a man by the name of Kish. This tribe, to which he belonged, was one of the smallest, and his family "the least of all the families of the tribe ;" not having been distinguished in any way to give it note and influence, and of an inferior rank. Yet he himself is spoken of as "a mighty man of power ;" which term, although referring chiefly to his great bodily strength, may perhaps, also, be intended to denote that he was a man of large possessions.

Kish had a son whose name was Saul ; remarkable for his fine personal appearance and great stature, being taller "from his shoulders and upward" than any of the people. "There was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he." His natural talents, too, would seem to have been of an elevated kind ; and his traits of character suited to maintain a commanding influence among his countrymen. Of his moral

qualities we cannot form so favorable an opinion; as his subsequent history will show. He had reached the years of manhood; was married; and had three sons and two daughters. So that he was one of the few among the Israelites—the very few probably—who would strike the great body of the people as deserving the high dignity of swaying over them the sceptre of regal power. The multitude would be captivated especially with his lofty and majestic bearing, his bodily prowess, and his personal courage; and in selecting him for their sovereign, it seems that God intended to gratify the wishes of their hearts. They desired *such a king*, and in having such a one, they were to learn by experience the direful consequences attending their defection from their rightful monarch, Jehovah, the covenant Head of their nation.

The steps which led, in the course of Providence, to the placing of Saul on the throne were few and simple. The asses of his father had strayed from home, and could not be found. Saul was directed to go in quest of them, with one of the servants. They passed through the regions of Mount Ephraim; of Shalisha, in the tribe of Dan; of Shalim, near to Jerusalem; and of their own tribe, on their way back; but without succeeding in the accomplishment of their object. Coming to the land of Zuph, where Samuel re-

sided, Saul proposed to the servant that they should cease making any farther search, and take the shortest course home ; " lest," said he, " my father leave caring for the asses, and take thought for us." They had been absent a long time for such a purpose, and he feared their family would feel great anxiety on this account.

But there was one other resource which struck the mind of the servant. He knew the character of Samuel ; and they were at this time in the immediate vicinity of the place in which he dwelt. " Behold now," said he, " there is in this city a man of God, and he is an honorable man : all that he saith cometh surely to pass : now let us go thither ; peradventure he can show us our way that we should go."

Saul saw a difficulty in doing this. It was customary then, as it still is, among the eastern nations, for those of an inferior rank, when they would gain a favorable access to a superior, to approach him with a present of some kind. So indispensable is this considered to the preservation of the dignity of such persons, that they will receive gifts even of very little value if the circumstances of those who offer them make this necessary. Mr. Bruce tells us that whether it be dates or diamonds, this giving of presents is so much a part of their manners, that without them an inferior will never be at peace in his own

mind, or think that he has a hold on his superior for his favor or protection. Indeed, so common is this custom, that in familiar intercourse among persons of inferior station, they seldom neglect to bring a flower, an orange, a few dates or radishes, or some such token of respect, to the person whom they visit.

Saul was not willing to approach the presence of so venerable and exalted a personage as Samuel, without showing him this customary honor. "Behold," said he to the servant, "if we go, what shall we bring the man? for the bread is spent in our vessels, and there is not a present to bring to the man of God: what have we?"

"I have here at hand," was the reply, "the fourth part of a shekel of silver," (about thirteen cents;) "that will I give the man of God, to tell us our way." Not that either himself, or Saul, regarded Samuel as being so mercenary as to withhold his counsel unless he were paid for it; but that they wished, in seeking his aid, to treat him with that usual mark of respect which we have seen was due to one so much their superior. The proposal of the servant met Saul's approbation; and they directed their course towards the city in quest of Samuel. As they ascended the hill on which it stood, they met some young women going out to the wells in the neighbor-

hood to draw water, and inquired of them if *the seer*, as he was called at that time, (a term equivalent to *prophet*,) was there.

"He is," they replied; "behold, he is before you: make haste now, for he came to-day to the city; for there is a sacrifice of the people to-day in the high-place: as soon as ye be come into the city, ye shall straightway find him, before he go up to the high-place to eat: for the people will not eat until he come, because he doth bless the sacrifice; and afterwards they eat that be bidden. Now therefore get you up: for about this time ye shall find him."

Saul and his servant followed these directions; and as they entered the city, Samuel met them on his way to the place where he was about to discharge his priestly duties. He had been warned of Saul's approach. A communication from the Lord was made to him, the day before, to that effect. "To-morrow about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hands of the Philistines: for I have looked upon my people, because their cry is come unto me."

And, now, as Samuel cast his eye upon Saul, it was in some way made known to him by Jehovah, that this was the individual designed to

be raised to so exalted a station. He who was to be king of Israel stood before him ; and we may well conceive what mingled emotions of wonder and regret the sight produced in the breast of the prophet. It was the person with whose conduct and destiny that of the whole nation was now to be indissolubly connected. He would soon become the monarch they had so ardently desired, and would also be the cause, in connection with their own transgressions, of drawing down upon them the severest judgments of an offended God. And yet the divine purposes must be fulfilled. Samuel must not hesitate to do his duty. He must go forward, and follow the directions of Jehovah, and prepare the way for Saul's induction, by his own hand, into the kingly office, however painful may be the task, and gloomy his anticipations of the result. But he knew that God would overrule it for good. His government would reach every thing connected with this portentous change ; his wisdom, his justice, and his benevolence would be illustriously and perfectly displayed ; and the cause of truth and righteousness be made, at last, to triumph.

Happy are those who, like Samuel, have an unwavering confidence in God ; who can implicitly obey his commands, and discharge their duty in the most trying circumstances ; and who can quietly leave *the issues of events* in his hands.

CHAPTER XI.

Samuel anoints Saul, and tells him what he must do.

It was in the gate of the city that Saul met Samuel, as the latter was passing through it to "the high place" without the walls, where the sacrifice was made and the feast attending it celebrated. He ventured to accost him, probably anticipating, from his appearance, that he was the very person of whom he was in quest, and making the inquiry in this modest manner, "Tell me, I pray thee, where the seer's house is."

"I am the seer," was the reply; to which Samuel very kindly and respectfully added,—"go up before me unto the high place; for ye shall eat with me to-day, and to-morrow I will let thee go, and will tell thee all that is in thine heart;" all that concerning which thou art particularly anxious to know, and to receive my counsel. "And as for thine asses that were lost three days ago, set not thy mind on them; for they are found;" thus showing Saul that he already knew what was in his heart, and convincing him that Samuel enjoyed the privilege of having direct communications from Jehovah. Saul would, in this way, be led to place confidence in the decla-

rations of the prophet respecting more important concerns, and especially his being selected from among his countrymen to be their king.

Such is the connection between one event and another in God's providential arrangements. So apparently unimportant an affair as the loss of his father's asses, was to be one of the means of satisfying the chosen monarch of Israel that he who could know the thoughts of his heart respecting them, was authorized also to announce to him the will of Jehovah in regard to his unexpected and wonderful elevation.

This announcement was now to be made. It must have fallen strangely on the ear of Saul, as he heard it from the lips of Samuel. "On whom is all the desire of Israel ? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father's house ?"

The import of these few words, so full of meaning, was not misunderstood. Saul, with apparent, and perhaps unaffected modesty, replied, " Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel ? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin ? wherefore then speakest thou so to me ?"

Samuel seems to have made no answer to this ; but conducting Saul and his servant into the room where the sacred feast was to be held, assigned them the chief place among the guests, who were about thirty in number. Another pecu-

liar mark of respect was also paid to Saul. Samuel directed one of the attendants to bring, and place before him, a portion of meat which had been set apart for this very purpose, inviting him to partake of it, and adding, "for unto this time hath it been kept for thee since I said, I have invited the people." It was the shoulder, the best of the portions of which the guests were to eat, and indicating, in their presence, that he to whom it was given was, in the estimation of the seer, a person of high distinction.

After the festival was over, and they had returned to the city, Saul communed with Samuel on the roof of the house to which they resorted; a convenient place for such a purpose, being flat, and exposed to the refreshing breezes that might pass over it. Here the inhabitants of that region were accustomed to sit and converse, and often to sleep, for the sake of the cool air which could not be found within the dwelling. Although we are not told what was the subject of their conversation, we may readily conceive that it was of momentous import; referring doubtless to the extraordinary dignity which was soon to be conferred upon Saul, and embracing the counsels of Samuel, and, perhaps, some divine communications through him to the individual who was about to assume such high responsibilities. Must we not believe, also, that to these were added

the devout supplications of the prophet in behalf of his distinguished guest.

Early the ensuing morning, Saul having passed the hours of sleep on the roof of the house, Samuel called to him to arise, that he might attend him on his way. They departed in company; and as they were leaving the city, Samuel requested him to direct the servant to go on before, while he should stop awhile, and witness the carrying into effect the divine purpose with regard to him.

The prophet then proceeded to induct Saul into the kingly office; having doubtless the evening before prepared his mind for this significant ceremony. He took a vial of oil and poured it upon his head, to denote that he was thus sanctified, or set apart, for the peculiar service of God in the exercise of regal authority, and that he was divinely commissioned to perform its important functions. He also kissed him, in token of affectionate and loyal allegiance, and exclaimed, "Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?"

How simple these rites; performed, too, without any assemblage of spectators, or the exhibitions of pomp and public rejoicings that are customary on such occasions. But they take place in accordance with the divine direction, and He who is the King of kings and Lord of

lords will see to it that they are not an unmeaning formality. He who has just been anointed by the prophet shall surely wear the crown.

Samuel, before taking leave of Saul, wished to impress him still more deeply with the conviction that in constituting him king of Israel, and in giving him some further directions with regard to the course he should pursue, the prophet was acting in his official capacity, and under the immediate instructions of Jehovah. For this purpose he told Saul of certain things which would happen to him soon after their separation, and which, as they came to pass, would be affording additional proof that the hand of God was in the whole matter.

"When thou art departed from me to-day," said he, "then thou shalt find two men by Rachel's sepulchre in the border of Benjamin at Zelzah; and they will say unto thee, The asses which thou wentest to seek are found: and lo, thy father hath left the care of the asses, and sorroweth for you, saying, What shall I do for my son? Then shalt thou go on forward from thence, and thou shalt come to the plain of Tabor, and there shall meet thee three men going up to God to Beth-el, one carrying three kids, and another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine: And they will salute thee, and give thee two loaves of bread;

which thou shalt receive of their hands. After that thou shalt come to the hill of God, where is the garrison of the Philistines: and it shall come to pass, when thou art come thither to the city, that thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high-place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp before them; and they shall prophecy: and the Spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophecy with them, and shalt be turned into another man. And let it be, when these signs are come unto thee, that thou do as occasion shall serve thee; for God is with thee. And thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal; and behold, I will come down unto thee, to offer burnt-offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace-offerings: seven days shalt thou tarry, till I come to thee, and show thee what thou shalt do."

The hill of God here mentioned, was probably near Gibeah, where Saul's father resided. On it a garrison of the Philistines was stationed, to watch the surrounding territory, and keep the inhabitants in subjection.

Here, also, or near this place, was a school of the prophets, in which, under the direction of Samuel as the principal leader of the establishment, pious young men were educated to become the religious teachers of the people, and, at times, to exercise the gift of prophecy. A band of these

would meet Saul; the Spirit of the Lord prompting them to utter prayers and exhortations, and to sing sacred songs accompanied by musical instruments, and interspersed, perhaps, with strains of prophetic announcement—though it is most probable, that the word *prophesy* in this connection is to be understood in its restricted sense, as referring only to that part of their functions which consisted in giving religious instruction, and conducting the public devotions. They would be coming down from *the high-place*, where some religious solemnities had been attended; and Saul, under a divine impulse, would join them in their hymns of praise and other exercises, and be endued by the Spirit of the Lord with those peculiar qualities that would fit him to pass from the inferior station which he had hitherto occupied to the very exalted one of being the king of Israel. In both these respects he would "be turned into another man."

Did he feel the value of these privileges about to be bestowed upon him? Did he recognize the goodness of God in thus preparing him for the discharge of his arduous duties? Was he sensible of his need of divine aid? Did he cherish the sentiments of a humble dependance on the Almighty for it, and pray continually that it might be afforded him? We have reason to fear that this was not the case; Ah! *had it been*, what a

different character would he have left to be recorded on the inspired pages; what an illustrious example for those in places of dignity and power to follow! As it is, let us learn this important lesson, that *no greatness is worthy of our praise, if it is unaccompanied with true piety of heart.*

CHAPTER XII.

Saul among the prophets. The Israelites assemble at Mizpeh.
Saul is chosen king by the lot. He goes to Gibeah.

As Saul was taking his leave of Samuel, we are told that "God gave him another heart." New thoughts and feelings were infused into his soul, to prepare him for the important duties which were about to devolve upon him in becoming the acknowledged sovereign of the Israelites. He is no more to be occupied with the employments of husbandry, and to move in a retired and humble sphere. Instead of looking after the lost asses of his father, he is to conduct the affairs of a great nation. The Philistines are to be subdued, and his countrymen delivered from their

oppression. Armies must be raised for this purpose, and the Israelites roused to action. Existing grievances must be redressed ; the new government organized ; the proper officers appointed ; the necessary laws made ; and justice faithfully administered.

What a sudden and surprising change is to take place in the condition of this hitherto obscure person. A peculiar, divine influence is needed to enable him to sustain it. His mind expands with enlarged views. His heart is filled with new aspirations. His resolution of soul assumes a tone in some degree equal to the emergency. He is no longer Saul, the tiller of the earth, and the keeper of the flocks of Kish, but Saul, the captain of the Israelitish hosts, the defender of his country's rights, the monarch of a mighty people. In these important respects *God gave him another heart.*

He advances on his way according to the directions of Samuel, and at every step finds the predictions of the prophet fulfilled. He meets the two men near the tomb of Rachel, who tell him that the asses are found. He is saluted by the three others in the plain of Tabor, going to Bethel to offer up their sacrifices, and receives from them, what he much needed, two loaves of bread for his sustenance. His confidence in the declarations of Samuel is established, and he feels that

he is indeed to wear the crown rightfully, by the appointment of God himself.

He approaches the hill near Gibeah, and the company of the prophets are descending. Moved by the Spirit of God, which comes upon him, he joins the band, and prophesies with them, taking a part in their exercises. Well may those who know him be struck with astonishment at the sight, and exclaim, "What is this that is come unto the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?" Some one replies, "But who is their father?" as if to explain the wonder, and to show that God who is *the father of the prophets*, the inspirer of the truths which they utter, and of the sentiments which breathe through their prayers and their praises, can easily move by his Spirit on the mind of Saul, and add him to their number.

Still, it was strange to witness one of his previous condition and character thus associated with those who held so high and holy a station; and it afterwards became a proverb among the Israelites, when referring to an individual placed in circumstances of a similar nature, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

When his prophesyings were ended, and also his public, devotional exercises at the high place, Saul returned home. His uncle had heard of his interview with Samuel, and was curious to know

the purport of it. But Saul deemed it best not to inform him of any thing that related to the subject of his becoming king of Israel, simply saying, "he told us plainly that the asses were found."

Very soon after these events, Samuel called together the Israelites to appear before the Lord at Mizpeh, that they might receive his directions with regard to the individual who was now, by divine authority, to become their first monarch, and to enter publicly upon his official duties. He thus addressed them—his words few—their import fearful.

" Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all kingdoms, and of them that oppressed you: And ye have this day rejected your God, who himself saved you out of all your adversities, and your tribulations; and ye have said unto him, Nay, but set a king over us. Now therefore present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes, and by your thousands."

What must this infatuated people expect in thus casting contempt, as it were, upon Jehovah, their covenant-sovereign, and choosing to transfer their allegiance from his sceptre to that of a weak, sinful, fallible mortal! Had they no anticipations of the merited and terrible judgments they must endure? Did the consciences of none

among them wake up to a sense of their guilt and danger; and utter their misgivings; and call upon the assembled multitudes to pause and retrace their steps ere it were too late?

No; not an indication of this appears. A blind, reckless impulse urges them forward. They are bent on the pursuit of their object. They stand marshalled into their respective tribes before the Lord, awaiting in anxious expectation the result. Samuel directs the lot to be cast, and it falls upon the tribe of Benjamin. This tribe is ordered to approach him, and is divided into its respective families. The lots are again cast, and the family of Matri is taken; and, at length, Saul is designated, the son of Kish, as the individual whom the Lord has chosen. But he is not to be found. Why does he elude the search? Has the solemn expostulation of Samuel alarmed his fears? Does he, for a moment, shrink back from participating in the heinous sin of his countrymen? Or, has he some forebodings of the tremendous responsibilities he will have to assume, and of the difficulties and dangers that must attend his elevation to the throne? Or, is it rather the stratagem of an affected modesty, which others besides Saul have practised, to enlist the popular sentiment yet more strongly in his favor? Whatever is the inotive, Saul secretes himself; and the people through Samuel make inquiry of the Lord whether

the king whom the lot has marked out is to appear.

The response directs them to his hiding-place. They run eagerly to it, and bring him before Samuel. He is easily seen by the crowds who press forward to behold him, as his tall and princely form stands towering in height above the heads of the whole assembly.

"See ye him," cries the prophet, "whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people." Joyful acclamations rend the air; and a general shout ascends to heaven of "God save the king." Thus the Israelites accept their appointed sovereign, and by this public act avow their allegiance to his authority. Samuel then explained still farther to the people some more particulars respecting the manner in which the affairs of the kingdom were to be conducted, and having recorded them in a book to be laid up among the sacred archives, dismissed the assembly, and they all returned to their respective homes. Saul, also, went to his in Gibeah, accompanied by a choice band of men whose hearts God had disposed to do this, and to lend their aid, if necessary, in the maintenance of his regal power. For, even at this early stage of the new course which the nation had desired to take, there were disaffected spirits who found fault with the individual whom both the Lord and the people

at large had chosen. It is most probable that the obscure condition from which Saul was raised was the cause of this, and that some of the leaders of the opposition were aspiring individuals whose rank in life had led them to indulge the expectation that they themselves would be so fortunate as to wear the crown. Disappointed ambition engendered envy and hate; and these "children of Belial," as they are termed—worthless, turbulent men, spread their murmurs on all sides, declaring that Saul was wholly incompetent to the task of swaying the sceptre of the nation and delivering it from the oppression of its enemies. They despised his rule; nor did they bring him any presents in proof of their loyalty, as others did. But Saul was wise enough not to betray any apprehensions of danger. He took no notice of those who were thus disaffected towards him, and remained in quiet seclusion, waiting the indications of Providence, or perhaps some express, divine direction to guide him in his future course.

The probation of Saul in his new and trying circumstances has begun. As it advances, we shall find his character developing itself in a clearer and clearer light. We shall do well particularly to notice its traits, and to learn from them, and from the whole course of his conduct, how much *rulers*, as well as people, need to *cherish a heart-felt piety* if they desire to enjoy the

continued protection and blessing of God. The wicked may prosper for a season. But, in most cases, even *in this world* their history will disclose to us the expressions of the divine displeasure which they bring down upon themselves; and we know that continuing in sin their final doom must be terrible indeed.

What has been the course of *your* past life, my dear reader? What is to be its future history? Your character will be continually forming and disclosing its traits, and yourself preparing for the retributions of eternity. *God will be trying you*, whatever your condition in life may be. Look forward to *the result* of this probation. Consider your latter end.

CHAPTER XIII.

Saul defeats the Ammonites.

While Saul was in retirement at Gibeah, continuing still his customary manner of life, an event occurred which soon opened the way for his being drawn forth to act as the monarch of

the nation. Nahash, king of the Ammonites, a people living on the east side of the Jordan, had advanced with a powerful army as far as Jabesh-gilead, and laid siege to the place. The inhabitants were alarmed at the numbers of the enemy, and proposed to become tributary to Nahash, if he would offer them favorable terms. "Make a covenant with us," was their request, "and we will serve thee."

His conditions were too cruel to be complied with. He required that the men of Jabesh-gilead should submit to have their right eyes plucked out, "for a reproach," as he said, "upon all Israel." His vindictive feelings led him to desire, in this way, to inflict a national disgrace upon them and their countrymen, and to make them wear continually, as it were, the badge of their servitude. In addition to this, it would be the means of rendering them less capable, afterwards, of fighting with success. For, in the personal conflicts which took place in battle in those times, the shield when raised for protection would obstruct the sight of the left eye, and the right being wanting, the individual would be prevented from seeing his antagonist, and be exposed, of course, to almost certain destruction.

The elders of the city, in reply to his barbarous proposal, demanded of Nahash a respite of seven days, in which time they said they would send

messengers into various parts of their country, and if not relieved by an adequate force of the Israelites, they would surrender. Feeling confident, probably, that they would be wholly disappointed in their expectations, and that thus they would be obliged to yield without any sacrifice of the lives of his men, he acceded to their terms, and quietly waited the issue.

The messengers came to Gibeah, and on their arrival made known, without delay, the object of their mission. All who heard it were deeply affected. They sympathized with their distant countrymen who were in such a perilous condition, and wept aloud, filling the air with their lamentations. Saul, who was coming out of the field, inquired into the cause. On hearing it, the Spirit of God came upon him, moving him by a peculiar impulse to feel strongly for the honor of the nation, and the men of Jabesh-gilead. "His anger was kindled greatly." The energies of his soul were summoned to action. His resolute and unflinching purpose was formed. He burst forth, at once, from his temporary obscurity, to show himself the king and the warrior, and to command both the wonder and obedience of his people.

The step which he took was prompt, bold, and decided. He determined to make a deep impression on the minds of the Israelites, in a manner

that was customary in those times, by a striking appeal to their senses. Taking a yoke of oxen, he hewed them in pieces, and sent the portions throughout the different tribes, with this message: "Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen."

The summons produced its intended effect. The combined influence of the king and the prophet, with the threatening of the former, and still more the fear of resisting what was regarded as a divine mandate, caused a general and simultaneous movement. The armed men rushed from all sides to the standard of their sovereign. The hosts assembled at Bezek; and when Saul numbered them, he found that there were of the tribe of Judah thirty thousand, and of the other tribes three hundred thousand.

The occasion demanded despatch. So far it had not been wanting. It must still be made. Saul immediately sent the messengers who had come from Jabesh-gilead to that city, to tell the inhabitants that on the following day he would come with his vast army to their relief. The besieged were delivered from their fears. Inspired with joy and courage, they informed the Ammonites that they would come out to meet them on the morrow; adding, "and ye shall do with us all that seemeth good unto you." It was an am-

biguous message ; the information of the promised assistance being concealed, and the enemy left to conclude that the surrender would be made on their own terms. Yet the men of Jabesh-gilead did, indeed, intend to come out and meet the Ammonites, but in a very different manner from what the latter expected.

In the meanwhile Saul had arranged his forces in three grand divisions, and hastened, during the remainder of the day and the ensuing night, to the field of action. By day-break he came upon the camp of the enemy, and attacking it at three different points, his men soon made their way into the very midst of the Ammonites, commencing the work of destruction with tremendous slaughter, and continuing it till mid-day, when the discomfiture of Nahash and his army was complete. A few escaped, but so few that we are told "two of them were not left together" to flee away in company.

Such a triumph over the army of a nation whose power and oppression the Israelites so much dreaded, was cause to them of the highest exultation. In the midst of their rejoicings, he who had been the successful leader of the enterprise would be held by the soldiery as worthy of their most devoted regard. In this case the chieftain and the monarch were united in the same person ; and Saul, as might be expected, by his

promptitude and resolution, together with his military skill and personal bravery, had won the hearts of those whom he had just led to so glorious a victory. The enthusiasm of the occasion awakened the sentiment in their breasts of a deep and general loyalty towards their new sovereign; and their indignation burst forth against those of their countrymen who had dared, as we have seen, to withhold from him the expressions of their allegiance, and insinuated that he was unworthy to wear the crown. A few of this number were probably among them. Calling, therefore, upon Samuel, they exclaimed, "Who is he that said, Shall Saul reign over us? bring the men that we may put them to death."

But Saul was too magnanimous, or politic, to suffer their demands to be carried into execution. "There shall not a man," he said, "be put to death this day: for to-day the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel."

True greatness of soul seeks not the gratification of personal revenge. It rises above such vindictive feelings, and especially when the perpetrator of the supposed injury can be made the sure victim of resentment, without the means of resistance or escape. But it may, and often does, despise the meanness of inflicting chastisement in such a case, while it knows nothing of the spirit of true forgiveness.

We must do something more than abstain from avenging ourselves upon those who have done us wrong. We must forgive them, as we hope to be forgiven by our Father who is in heaven. We must be sorry not so much that they have offended *us*, as that they have done what is infinitely worse—sinned against God. We must pity and pray for them. We must be willing and ready to do them good, meekly and kindly. We must especially strive to *do their souls good*, and to lead them to exercise piety towards God and benevolence towards man. Happy, indeed, is he who can thus *imitate the example of Christ*.

CHAPTER XIV.

The people assemble at Gilgal. Samuel's address to them.

The time had now come, in the providence of God, for Saul to assume the management of public affairs, and for the Israelites to renew the expressions of their allegiance to him. Samuel, therefore, undoubtedly by divine direction, gave orders for the assembling of the people at Gilgal,

that these objects might be carried into effect. We have no particular account of the ceremonies that took place ; but as we are told that "they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal," it is most probable that he was again anointed by Samuel, and inducted into office in a manner suited to the august occasion. Among other public acts of a religious nature, " they sacrificed sacrifices of peace-offerings before the Lord ; and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly."

Samuel availed himself of this opportunity to appeal to his countrymen with regard to the integrity of his course of official conduct, and to give them what he knew they much needed, the counsels of one whom age and experience, and still more, the fear and service of God, had taught wisdom. He spoke to those who could not but listen with feelings of deep respect towards so venerable and excellent a man. He spoke from the heart, not merely as one having authority, but as a father to his children. Both speaker and hearers must have felt it to be an occasion of deep interest ; and his address, so characteristic of the distinguished individual who delivered it, and of the people to whom it was made, deserves our especial notice.

"Behold," said he, "I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have

made a king over you. And now, behold, the king walketh before you: and I am old and gray-headed; and behold, my sons are with you: and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day. Behold, here I am: witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed; whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you."

To this there was one spontaneous reply. "Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken aught of any man's hand." Samuel proceeded. "The Lord is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that ye have not found aught in my hand."

The people answered. "He is witness."

Again the voice of their prophet and judge was heard. "It is the Lord that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the Lord of all the righteous acts of the Lord, which he did to you and to your fathers. When Jacob was come into Egypt, and your fathers cried unto the Lord, then the Lord sent Moses and Aaron, which brought forth your fathers out of Egypt, and made them dwell in this place. And when they

forgat the Lord their God, he sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the host of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them. And they cried unto the Lord, and said, We have sinned, because we have forsaken the Lord, and have served Baalim and Ashtaroth: but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve thee. And the Lord sent Jerubbaal, (that is Gideon,) and Bedan,* and Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and ye dwelled safe. And when ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the Lord your God was your king. Now therefore, behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired! and behold, the Lord hath set a king over you. If ye will fear the Lord, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall both ye, and also the king that reigneth over you, continue following the Lord your God." He will protect and bless you, and the kingdom shall continue. "But if ye will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the

* Some think this refers to Samson; others to Barak, or Jair.

commandment of the Lord, then shall the hand of the Lord be against you, as it was against your fathers."

To show that he spoke in the name of the Lord, Samuel, in the presence of the people, appealed to a miraculous attestation of the truth of what he had been saying. It was a season of the year when a thunder-storm very rarely, if ever, occurred; and no indications of the approach of one were visible. Under such circumstances what but the immediate interposition of the Almighty, in answer to the request of his prophet, could furnish such an attestation?

"Stand," exclaimed Samuel, "and see this great thing, which the Lord will do before your eyes. Is it not wheat harvest to-day? I will call unto the Lord, and he shall send thunder and rain; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking you a king."

The call of the prophet was heard. The Almighty answered. Instantly the heavens were shrouded with a covering of dense, dark clouds. The lightnings flashed in quick succession. Deep thunders rolled; and torrents of rain descended. The predicted miracle was too striking to admit of any hesitation or doubt. It overwhelmed the Israelites with terror. We are told that "all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel."

They feared that what they saw and heard was but the prelude of some terrible judgments to be inflicted upon them. "Pray for thy servants," they cried out in their consternation, "pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not; for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king."

"Fear not," replied the prophet; "ye have done all this wickedness;" it is indeed true, as you confess it to be, that you have sinned greatly against God, but he is ready to pardon and to bless, if you will but serve him in future. Therefore take courage, and go forward in the path of duty; "Yet turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart; and turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things," (or idols,) "which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain. For the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people. Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way: only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king."

Consider how great things he hath done for you.

Well may this appeal be also made to the reader. Has not God, indeed, my young friend, done great things for *you*?

It is a great thing that he has cast your lot in this highly-favored land, and connected your birth with so many propitious circumstances—among others, perhaps, with the inestimable privilege of having pious, praying parents.

It is a great thing that he has preserved you till this day; guarding you against innumerable dangers, and making provision for your comfort in ways so various and bountiful.

It is a great thing that he has shown towards you so much forbearance and long-suffering, not cutting you down in the midst of your sins, and banishing you for ever from his presence as the just reward of your wickedness.

It is a great thing that he has given you so many opportunities of improving in useful knowledge, and especially in the most important of all kinds of knowledge, that of his own character and will, and of your character and duty.

It is a great thing—the wonder of wonders—the wonder that angels desire to have unfolded to their eager and adoring gaze—that God sent his only and well-beloved Son into our world, to die the accursed death of the cross, that sinners like you and me might obtain eternal life.

It is a great thing that Christ was willing to

come, and that by his obedience, sufferings, and death, he consummated the work of redeeming love.

It is a great thing that the Spirit of God has been striving with your spirit to lead you to Christ, to holiness, and to heaven.

It is a great thing that you have had the word of God in your own language and hands, and that you have enjoyed the blessings of the christian Sabbath, and so many other means of religious improvement and growth in grace.

It is a great thing if you indulge the hope of being a follower of Christ, that he has thus chosen you out of the world, and drawn you to himself ; and that having thus loved you as his own, he will love you unto the end.

It is a great thing if you have no such hope, that *you may have it*. The very fact that you are reading these pages, shows that God is waiting to be gracious ; that Christ is still stretching out his arms to receive you ; and that the Spirit of grace is ready to assist you in your efforts to go to this Saviour. How great will be your guilt, if you any longer refuse to do this !

Consider how great things God hath done for you ; your obligations to love and to serve him in the Gospel of his Son, how immense ! your sin and folly in not yielding him the homage of your heart, how inexcusable, how aggravated, how hell-deserving !

CHAPTER XV.

The Philistines prepare to attack the Israelites. Samuel's reproof to Saul.

Of what took place at Gilgal the Scriptures furnish us no account, nor of the circumstances attending the return of the Israelites to their respective tribes. The transactions which have been related occurred before Saul had completed the first year of his reign, and they surely bore a very auspicious aspect with regard to the stability and success of his government. Thus far he had signally enjoyed the Divine favor. The continuance of it, both towards the monarch and his people, depended upon their mutual obedience to the King of kings.

We next hear of Saul, during the second year of his reign, at Michmash, a few miles west of Jerusalem, and at Mount-Bethel, in the neighborhood of the former place, with a force of two thousand men; while a thousand more were under the command of his son Jonathan, at Gibeah. The rest of the armed men had been dismissed and returned to their respective homes.

Jonathan, who appears, although yet a young man, to have been possessed of great military

courage, could not suffer himself and his party to remain long inactive. He attacked and defeated a garrison of the Philistines at Geba, which produced no small sensation among that people, as it did also among the Israelites ; Saul causing the news of it to be proclaimed throughout the kingdom.

It was soon known that the Philistines, being deeply incensed at the attack made upon them and the victory which attended it, were preparing to retaliate ; in consequence of which the people were again summoned to meet Saul at Gilgal. While they were doing this, the enemy had assembled their forces, and encamped in Michmash. Their army was a very numerous and formidable one, consisting of thirty thousand chariots, with their accompanying armed men, six thousand horsemen, "and people as the sand which is on the sea-shore in multitude."

Such a force on the part of the Philistines, produced great dismay among the Israelites. Many of them, overcome with fear, instead of flocking to the banner of their king, withdrew from the reach of his orders, and secreted themselves in the caves, and thickets, and rocky places, and woods, where concealment could be found ; while some fled across the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead, hoping in this way to escape the danger. Those who rallied round Saul, although

determined, at first, not to forsake him, yet partook deeply of the general consternation, and "followed him," as we are told, "trembling."

It seems that Samuel had engaged to meet Saul on the seventh day at Gilgal. That day came, but he had not yet arrived; while his absence was the cause of still greater discouragement among the people, who continued in considerable numbers to desert the standard of their sovereign. Saul became impatient. He felt as if he could wait no longer without taking some step that would calm the fears of his men, and inspire them with renewed confidence in him. He was placed in these circumstances to try him; to draw out his true character; to see whether he indeed trusted in God and was willing implicitly to obey his directions as communicated to him by the prophet Samuel.

The truth was, the time which the latter had set, in which to fulfil his appointment, had not yet expired. The last day had indeed come, but a part of that day remained. Saul should have waited till its close; feeling confident that the prophet would not disappoint him, and leaving the issue of events to the divine disposal. But he had no true faith. He could not rely implicitly on the Almighty arm; and would fain take the work of God into his own hands. He hastened to perform the customary religious rites by which

to propitiate the divine favor, and to procure, if possible, some token of it with an express direction how to proceed. He ordered a burnt-offering and peace-offerings to be brought, and himself offered up the former before the Lord.

Scarcely was this done, when Samuel approached the place. Saul, on hearing this, went out immediately to meet him ; hoping by the respect which he would show the prophet, and a suitable explanation of his conduct, to escape reproach. Samuel soon accosted him with the searching inquiry—"What hast thou done ?"

"Because I saw," was the reply, "that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash : Therefore, said I, the Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the Lord : I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt-offering."

This attempted apology only showed still farther the presumption of him who made it. Saul had rashly violated the divine law, by himself offering up those sacrifices which Samuel should have made, and now he would cast part of the blame of doing this on the prophet for not having arrived in season, when he well knew that the time appointed by the latter had not fully expired. What if the people in their fear were forsaking

him, and the Philistines threatening an attack, God could overrule these apparently unpropitious events for good, and afford both Saul and the Israelites the protection which they needed.

He received, therefore, a severe rebuke from Samuel, and that denunciation of the divine displeasure which his sinful conduct, springing from a want of confidence in God, and of the spirit of obedience to his commands, deserved.

"Thou hast done foolishly," said the prophet; "thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee."

Saul, it would seem, bore this reproof in silence. He must, however, have felt it deeply. Can it be that he hoped in some way to avert the impending judgment which hung over him, or, at least, that the prediction of the kingdom's departing from him and his family would not be fulfilled till some distant day? At any rate, he was resolved to go forward in encountering the Philistines, and maintaining his authority over the people. He immediately withdrew from Gil-

gal to Gibeah, Samuel accompanying him, and joined there his son Jonathan.

Without faith it is impossible to please God. He demands of his creatures the most entire confidence. He has a right to demand it. His character is perfect. His laws are holy, just, and good. His government is exercised in the most wise, righteous, and benevolent manner. The exhibitions that he has made of himself in the kingdoms of nature, of providence, and of grace ; the history of his dealings with our race in every age, and with each of us since we have had a being ; all teach us that we ought not only to submit to his authority with an obedient and cheerful mind, but repose in him the full and constant reliance of the heart ; believing that it is both our duty and interest to do this, and that if we do it he will never leave us, nor forsake us.

It was because Saul failed in having this confidence in God, and the obedience to his commands which it always inspires, that he received, as we have seen, the rebuke of Samuel, and was doomed to lose his kingdom.

Reader, *hast thou faith in God ?* Dost thou believe, in thy heart, all that he declares to be true in his written Word ? Does thy belief lead thee to be *a doer of the Word ?* Is it within thee a living principle of love and obedience to God ; of an affectionate trust in Christ ; and of good

will to thy fellow-men? Ah! if thou hast not this faith, thou wilt lose a kingdom of infinitely more value than that earthly one which Saul lost.

CHAPTER XVI.

Bravery of Jonathan. Saul defeats the Philistines.

When Saul numbered the armed men that were with him, he found that they amounted to only about six hundred. What an humiliating contrast between this small force, and the army of three hundred and thirty thousand with which he so lately triumphed over the Ammonites. He could not but have noticed in this the Divine hand. It should have led him to deep humility of soul in view of his past offences, and to devout supplications to God, that he would the more effectually interpose in his behalf. We have no evidence that either of these took place. The Lord might, indeed, now give success to his arms, but it would not be the token of any lasting prosperity. It would only show that the divine purposes must be accomplished, and the enemies of Israel destroyed.

In the meanwhile the Philistines were ready to

take advantage of the timidity of the Israelites. A part of them, sallying forth from their camp in three separate bands, and taking different directions, overran the country, making great havoc among the lives and property of the inhabitants, and returning again in safety. Saul was the more reluctant to encounter this formidable enemy from the fact that his men were destitute of any weapons made of iron, and especially of the sword and spear, which were so necessary when they came into personal conflict in battle.

Of the means of making such weapons they had been entirely deprived ; their oppressors, the Philistines, having either carried away captive in their former wars, the artificers in iron, or forbidden those who might remain to pursue their occupation, lest they should furnish their countrymen with these necessary warlike instruments. Though the Israelites had some iron tools of husbandry and a file with which they used to sharpen them ; yet when they needed to do this more thoroughly, they had to resort to the workmen that were to be found only at the garrisons of the Philistines which were stationed in various parts of the country. To such an abject state of vas-salage had their conquerors reduced them. It is worthy of notice, that so great was the destitution which has been mentioned, that even of the officers who had the command of the soldiers,

none possessed a sword and a spear except Saul and Jonathan.

While things were in this position, the Philistines being encamped at Michmash, and the Israelites in the neighborhood of that place, at Gibeah, the former would often send out detachments, either to dare the enemy to battle, or to prepare the way for an assault upon them. But the Israelites kept close in their stronghold ; being, in some degree, protected from a sudden and general attack, by two precipitous rocks in the defile between Michmash and Gibeah. Samuel had left them, but the high priest Ahiah (the great-grandson of Eli, and also called Ahimelech) was there, wearing his ephod, whom Saul had sent for, to aid him in sustaining his authority, and probably to make inquiry, for him, of the Lord in case of emergency. The ark of the covenant, too, was in the camp ; and Saul congratulated himself and the people in thus having among them the token of God's presence, and, as he would hope, of his protection and favor. Ah ! little good would the priest or the ark do him, unless he had the spiritual presence of Jehovah in the temple of a confiding and obedient heart !

Jonathan became quite impatient of this state of things, and at length resolved to make a bold and sudden movement which might give a more cheering aspect to their affairs. He proposed to

a valiant companion of his in arms, the young man who was his armor-bearer, that they two should make an attack upon the garrison of the Philistines. He was, undoubtedly, led to this by a peculiar divine impulse, inspiring him with resolution to engage in the desperate enterprise, and invigorating his faith in the success with which the interposition of an Almighty arm could crown it. He communicated his project to no one else, not even to his father.

"Come," said he to his armor-bearer, "and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the Lord will work for us: for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few."

"Do all that is in thine heart," was the reply; "turn thee: behold, I am with thee according to thy heart."

It would seem, from what followed, that Jonathan had been asking a sign of the Lord, the more explicitly to direct him what to do. For he proposed that they should immediately proceed, and discover themselves to the Philistines. "If they say thus unto us," said he, "Tarry until we come unto you; then we will stand still in our place, and will not go up unto them. But if they say thus, Come up unto us; then we will go up; for the Lord hath delivered them into our hand: and this shall be a sign unto us."

They acted accordingly, and were at length seen by some of the Philistines in the garrison, who expressed their surprise, exclaiming, "Come up to us, and we will show you a thing."

Jonathan was assured of success. It was the voice of God, directing him to advance. He felt no hesitation. His faith was equal to the emergency. "Come up after me," said he to his companion; "for the Lord hath delivered them into the hand of Israel."

They scaled the summit of the rock, and began the work of destruction. Twenty of the enemy soon fell beneath their hand, and within a very short distance from the spot where they first made good their foot-hold. Consternation seized upon others. The alarm spread, and increased as it went. "There was trembling in the host, in the field, and among all the people: the garrison, and the spoilers, they also trembled, and the earth quaked: so it was a very great trembling," or, as it is rendered in the margin of our Bible, "a trembling of God." His interposition was a miraculous one. The earthquake which he sent, added to the universal panic produced by the assault of Jonathan and his armor-bearer, threw the whole body of the Philistines into such terror and confusion that they began to attack each other. Probably, they supposed that the army of the Israelites was making its way, after

its intrepid leaders, into the very midst of the camp ; and, being composed of different nations not familiar with each other, they mistook, amid the horrors of the scene, those of their own party for the enemy, and thus ensued a terrible slaughter among themselves. So great was the carnage, that the sentinels of Saul, stationed at the out-posts to watch the motions of the enemy, saw what was going on, and that the numbers of the Philistines were evidently decreasing by their own hands.

What had caused this ? Had any gone from the Israelitish camp to attack the enemy ? Such was the general inquiry. Saul, anxious to ascertain the fact, ordered his people to be numbered, that it might be seen if any were missing. What was his astonishment to ascertain that Jonathan and his armor-bearer were the only persons who were not to be found. He knew the bravery of his son, and understood, at once, the exploit which he had achieved, and the success that attended it. What step shall he take ? Something decided must be done. He will inquire of the Lord ; and for this purpose he orders Ahiah, the high priest, to bring forward the ark. The command is scarcely given, when louder and louder cries are heard from the camp of the Philistines. Saul is impatient to rush forward. His impetuous and self-confident spirit cannot wait for the di-

vine response. Abruptly forbidding Ahiah to proceed in the inquiry, and rallying his forces, he marches forth to engage the enemy.

In the meanwhile, those Israelites who were among the Philistines, held by them as servants in a state of bondage, taking advantage of the panic which prevailed, went over to the ranks of their countrymen. To these were added others who had lately fled from the dangers that they feared, and hid themselves in Mount Ephraim. In their flight the Philistines were still destroying each other. Saul, with his additional forces, pursued hard after them, attacking them in their rear, and putting numbers to death, till they came to Beth-aven. Here it seems the battle for the present ceased; the remaining Philistines making no more attempts to defend themselves, but fleeing towards their own country, while the victors, exhausted with the work of destruction, rested from the pursuit.

When God interposes, how quickly do his people triumph over their enemies. The fewness of the former, or the numbers and strength of the latter, present no insurmountable obstacle in the way of this. Two valiant men are sufficient to begin the career of victory, and ere long the small and hitherto fearful bands of the Israelites have vanquished the thousands of their oppressors "For there is no restraint to the Lord, to

save by many or by few." And so it happens to the christian in his contests with his spiritual foes, the world, the flesh, and the adversary of his soul. Let him but secure divine aid, putting on the whole armor of God, and fighting in the strength of the great Captain of his salvation, and he is sure of coming off conqueror. He may fear the struggle ; he may shrink back with a momentary dread, when he considers the power of his enemies ; but the Almighty arm shall sustain him, and give him, at length, a complete victory.

CHAPTER XVII.

Jonathan eats food contrary to Saul's command. Saul would have him put to death. But the people rescue him.

The Israelites suffered great fatigue and faintness from their conflict with the Philistines, and the more so as Saul had forbidden them to partake of any kind of nourishment during the day. He did this, that no time might be lost in the pursuit and destruction of the enemy, adjuring the people in the most solemn manner to obey

his orders, and pronouncing on those who should violate them, as if by divine authority, this terrible threatening: "Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies." It was a presumptuous as well as impolitic measure. What right had Saul to utter such a curse without any direction from the Lord? And how does his selfish and ambitious, not to say vindictive spirit, show itself, in issuing such orders, not that the honor of Jehovah, or the welfare of the nation might be promoted, but that *he*, as an individual, might take vengeance on his enemies. We must expect to find the judgments of God, at length, falling heavily upon a person of such a character.

The people, though hungry and faint, obeyed implicitly the commands of their sovereign. In passing through a wood, they found on the trees some wild honey, which abounded in Judea, dropping invitingly from the comb, but they dared not touch it, so much did they dread the curse that still sounded in their ears. Jonathan, however, who was not present when it was uttered, partook of the honey, and felt its reviving effect. We are told that his eyes *were enlightened*. Hunger and fatigue had so exhausted him, that even his sight had become dimmed from his great loss of strength, and was now restored again by the food that invigorated him.

He was soon told of the prohibition which his father had so solemnly laid upon the people. He felt that it was a most unwise one, and replied, " My father hath troubled the land: see, I pray you, how mine eyes have been enlightened, because I tasted a little of this honey. How much more, if haply the people had eaten freely to-day of the spoil of their enemies which they found? for had there not been now a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?"

In the evening, the prohibition being at an end, the people were so eager to allay the cravings of hunger, that rushing upon the sheep, and oxen, and calves which they had taken from the Philistines, they devoured them half roasted, and in some cases almost raw, without killing them in such a way as to separate the blood from the other parts. It was expressly forbidden in the law to use the blood of animals for food; and Saul, being told of the sin of the people in this respect, immediately gave orders to have a huge stone brought, and the animals that were yet to be eaten slain upon it, so that the blood might in that way flow out upon the ground, and the transgressions of the people cease. He, also, erected an altar to the Lord, (or, as some think, converted into one the stone which has just been referred to,) on which to offer sacrifices, and obtain, as he hoped, the divine favor. It was the first, we are

told, which he built. He did it without any divine direction to that effect—acting as he had already done before in a similar case, presumptuously and wickedly.

His next step was to call upon the people to renew the attack upon the Philistines; telling them that before the morning light they would be able to make the work of destruction so sure as not to leave one of the enemy alive.

"Do whatsoever seemeth good unto thee," was the reply; and Saul, proud of the confidence which was thus reposed in him, was about to lead forth his men to the pursuit, when Ahiah, the high priest, interposed. He deprecated the rash and unadvised manner in which such a measure was to be adopted. He felt the need of looking to God for direction, and proposed that it should be done. Saul yielded. The inquiry was made. "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Wilt thou deliver them into the hand of Israel?" were the questions proposed. But the priest consulted the Urim and Thummim in vain. No answer was given that day. Why was this? Was Jehovah displeased? Had Saul, or the Israelites, committed any such offence as to cause him to withdraw his favor from them?

Self-reproach was not likely to find its way into the breast of the king. He little thought that he had grievously sinned in issuing the orders which

he did, and that his forbidding the use of food by any one, without the divine direction, and with a vindictive spirit of revenge, might be the true source of the perplexity which he now experienced. Yet he believed there was an offender somewhere, and he would have him brought to light and punished. His apparent zeal for the honor of Jehovah burst forth. He even assumed the prerogative of the Almighty, and determined beforehand what the guilty individual should suffer as the penalty of his crime.

"Draw ye near hither," said he, "all the chief of the people: and know and see wherein this sin hath been this day. For, as the Lord liveth, which saveth Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die."

Not a voice was heard in reply. For most were aware that Jonathan, though without the knowledge of his father's commands, had eaten honey during the day, and they stood appalled at the threat of the king, and its fearful execution, should the disclosure be made. But he had already decided on the course he would pursue. He ordered all the people to stand on one side, while himself and Jonathan stood on the other. They obeyed, saying at the same time, "do what seemeth good unto thee."

Lots were to be cast; and Saul besought the Lord to give a result which would indicate the

transgressor. At first, the lot fell upon him and Jonathan ; and, on its being again cast, upon the latter.

"Tell me," said Saul, "what thou hast done."

"I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in my hand," replied Jonathan, "and, lo, I must die."

"God do so and more also: for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan," was the sentence that was heard to proceed from the lips of the inexorable father. It could not have been the spirit of obedience to Jehovah, or of allegiance to his authority, or of regard to his honor, that prompted it. It was rather, we have reason to believe, the stern mandate of a self-willed, haughty heart, which could not endure to have the pride of royalty sullied even by the ignorant violation of its orders. A son must be sacrificed to save it from this reproach.

But the Israelites well knew the circumstances of the case. They regarded Jonathan as innocent ; and being, in addition to this, strongly attached to him, they were indignant at the sentence. The voices of the leaders spoke the sentiments of all who were present. "Shall Jonathan die," they exclaimed, addressing Saul, "who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel? God forbid: as the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of his

head fall to the ground ; for he hath wrought with God this day."

The king did not dare to resist the remonstrance. He saw that he must yield ; and if his conscience had in any degree performed its office, he would have stood reproved in his own thoughts for his great wickedness in the sight of God, and regarded himself, and not Jonathan, as the cause of the divine displeasure.

But how deceitful is the human heart ! In the exhibition of his apparent zeal for the Lord, and of his anxiety to detect the guilty individual who was exposing the Israelites to the abandonment of the divine protection, Saul would fain make the people believe, and persuade himself also, that he was sinless.

Let us carefully examine ourselves, lest we cherish the same spirit. It is easy to denounce others, and to declaim against particular sins of which we can boast, as we think, that we ourselves are not guilty. When the community of which we are members, or the nation to which we belong, has reason to dread the judgments of God, how prone we are to look at those offences that *our* portion of the country, or *our* family, or *ourselves* cannot be distinctly charged with, and to give them prominence as the great, procuring causes of these terrific forebodings. Whereas, the reverse of this may be true, or at any rate,

we and our portion of the land may come in for a full share of the general sinfulness, and need repentance and reformation quite as much as those whom we accuse so censoriously.

When worms of the dust and fellow-sinners reprove each other, let it be done *in the spirit of meekness*; *each first casting out the beam that is in his own eye, that he may see clearly how to cast out the mote which is in his brother's eye.*

CHAPTER XVIII.

Samuel, by the divine direction, sends Saul to destroy the Amalekites.

It may seem strange, at first view, that the lot, which Saul besought the Lord might be directed aright, should fall on Jonathan who was innocent, and not rather on Saul himself, the guilty individual. But God saw fit to answer the inquiry made of him in accordance with its real intent. Saul supposed that the sin which had taken place was committed by the person who had violated

his orders in eating food, and this was the individual whom he wished to be designated by the lot. God had his own purposes to answer in replying to the inquiry as he did. In designating Jonathan, he meant simply to point him out as being the transgressor in the estimation of his father, but not, in this way, to impute to him any guilt. It served to draw forth the character of Saul in view of the Israelites, and thus to show how much he deserved the judgments which were yet to overtake him. He was severely rebuked for his vindictive and ambitious spirit by what took place, and gave up, at the time, any further design of pursuing the Philistines, who returned to their own country.

Being now firmly established in the kingdom, it was not long before Saul began once more to collect and lead forth his forces against his enemies. He carried on war, we are told, with the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines, with great success. "Whithersoever he turned himself, he vexed them." He went, too, with a formidable army against the Amalekites, gaining a complete victory over them, and delivering the Israelites out of the hands of those who oppressed and plundered them.

As a general he had great skill and military prowess, and did all within his power to make

his army equal to the emergencies of the time, adding to it continually such of the men as he saw were endowed with peculiar strength and valor.

Some particulars respecting Saul's destruction of the Amalekites are recorded in the sacred Scriptures, which deserve our notice. It seems that his expedition against them was undertaken by the express command of God, given through the prophet Samuel. "The Lord," said the latter, "sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and sucking, ox and sheep, camel and ass."

It was a severe decree; but that Being made it who is infinitely wise, and just, in all that he does, and who has a right to dispose of the lives and destiny of his creatures as seemeth to him best. The Amalekites had wantonly attacked the Israelites when they were on their way to the promised land, putting to death those who were in the rear, the feeble, faint, and weary. The curse then denounced against them and their

posterity, was now to be in part executed. Such is evidently one of the great laws of God's moral government over the world. The illustrations of it in the sacred Scriptures are attended with no greater perplexities than a thousand others, which his providential dealings with us and our fellow-men are continually affording. The sins of parents are, and always have been visited, in one form and another, upon their descendants. This is intended to enlist the strong feelings of parental attachment and regard to family character and destiny on the side of truth and righteousness, and to teach fathers and mothers their deep responsibility. It leads their offspring, too, on the one hand, to admire the goodness of God in the favors that he sees fit to bestow upon them on account of the piety and uprightness of their ancestors, if such was their character, and to cherish their memory with a filial gratitude; while, on the other, if their ancestors did not possess this character, what they are called, in consequence of this, to suffer, serves to give them more affecting views of the evil of sin, and of the divine indignation against it.

We must bear in mind, also, that if the children are exposed to the judgments of God in connection with the sins of the parents, they themselves are sinners, and on account of their own transgressions worthy of punishment. Most ge-

nerally they partake of the sins of their ancestors by committing the same kinds of offences, and showing that they would have been equally guilty had they lived at the time. Where they have not sinned after the manner of their parents, and are still involved in some general calamity with the guilty, as was the case of the infant children among the Amalekites, the visitation embraces only those temporal evils, of which death is one, to which all mankind as sinners are liable ; and with regard to their condition in the future world we may rest assured that God will do with them what is perfectly right and consistent with his holiness and mercy in Jesus Christ. His removing them by the sword of the Israelites is no more difficult to be reconciled with his justice or his goodness, than the innumerable instances in which he has in effect done the same thing, and often in much more aggravated forms of suffering, by diseases, earthquakes, storms, and volcanoes. The Amalekites, from the time of Moses to that of Saul, had continued to be an exceedingly corrupt and sinful people. One character pervaded the nation, both ancestors and descendants. Indeed, their guilt had been accumulating. The measure of their iniquity had become more and more full. The time of divine vengeance had arrived. The retributive justice of the Almighty overtakes them. Children must

suffer with their parents. The moral lesson to mankind will in this way be more awful and impressive, while in the retributions of the future state unerring justice will make it sure that not a single individual shall, on the whole, receive chastisement which is beyond his deserts, or have the least cause to complain.

We need to contemplate the severer attributes of Jehovah as well as his milder. He sits a sovereign on the throne of universal empire. His is a dominion of truth and righteousness; directed indeed by infinite wisdom and goodness; full of long suffering to sinners, and of forgiveness and grace to the truly penitent who come to him for pardon in the name of his Son, but inflexible in punishing the incorrigible offender with those fearful sufferings which will prove to be both the consequence and desert of his guilt. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

CHAPTER XIX.

Saul destroys the Amalekites, but takes their king prisoner, and saves some of the spoil. Samuel reproves him.

The Amalekites were a powerful people whose country stretched from Havilah towards the lower part of the Euphrates, to Shur on the Red Sea. Their manner of life was roving, so that no precise place can be assigned for their habitation; though the great body of them dwelt south of Palestine between Mount Seir and the border of Egypt. During the time of the Judges, they were confederated with the Midianites and Moabites to oppress the children of Israel, who, under the protection of Jehovah, obtained deliverance from this galling yoke of bondage through the intrepidity of Ehud and Gideon. Saul was now to be the instrument in the divine hand, of again crushing and almost annihilating this formidable enemy.

He assembled his forces at Telaim in the tribe of Judah. They amounted to ten thousand men of that tribe, and two hundred thousand of the rest, all on foot. At the head of this numerous army Saul came to a principal city of the Amalekites, and lay in wait in a neighboring valley, watching for a favorable moment to make an attack upon them.

In the meanwhile he sent word to certain of the Kenites to withdraw as speedily as possible from the Amalekites, in whose country they were dwelling ; that they might escape the destruction with which the latter would soon be overwhelmed. He did this, probably, in accordance with the divine direction given through the prophet Samuel, and assigned as the reason of it, that their ancestor Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, had showed kindness to the Israelites on their way to the promised land—affording another striking illustration of the truth which we have lately been considering, that the character of individuals has an intimate connection with God's providential treatment of their descendants.

As soon as the Kenites had withdrawn, which they did with great despatch, Saul commenced his hostile movements against the Amalekites. We have no account of the particular engagements. His triumph, however, over them seems to have been complete, attacking them in one part and another of their vast territory, and destroying them in great numbers. He smote them, we are told, "from Havilah until thou comest to Shur, that is over against Egypt." Elated with the success of his arms, this self-confident monarch gave at this very time another proof that he had nothing of the true spirit of loyalty towards that Being who was thus crowning his career with

prosperity and glory. Proud in his own strength, he neglected to obey the express injunctions of Jehovah; and his example was followed also by his people. He did not carry into effect the divine decree for the complete extermination of the Amalekites, and the entire destruction of their substance. He spared the life of their king Agag, detaining him as a prisoner to gratify, probably, in this way, his feelings of exultation over a conquered foe, and to give additional splendor to his triumph. We are told, too, that Saul and his army spared "the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly." All this was done in open defiance of the divine command, and called loudly for the judgments of heaven, especially upon the individual who had it in his power to prevent the offence. These judgments were preparing for execution.

Samuel received a communication from Jehovah to the following effect: "It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments."

The prophet anticipated the result. The language of the communication satisfied him, that the purpose of God was to bring the reign of

Saul to a close, and this, probably, ere long. What new scenes were to open before his beloved country? What embarrassment would follow this change of government; and what confusion and wretchedness attend their affairs! Who was to be the successor of Saul? What part had Samuel himself yet to take in this critical emergency, and what unexpected responsibilities to assume at his advanced period of life? These and similar reflections crowded upon the mind of the prophet, and oppressed his spirit with fearful forebodings. He sought relief where he had often before found it—precious relief, and from a never-failing source. He betook himself to prayer, and in the extremity of his grief passed the whole night in pouring forth his supplications in behalf of himself and his countrymen before the mercy-seat. Unquestionably his prayers were heard and answered. His soul was refreshed by communion with his God. A divine influence descended to sustain, to encourage, and to guide him. Some communications, also, from the Lord were made to him at the time, of the particulars of which we are not informed.

Samuel went forth at an early hour, the ensuing morning, to find Saul. He was told that the latter, after having come to Carmel and erected some kind of triumphal monument there as the memorial of his victories, had gone to Gilgal.

Thither the prophet immediately followed him, and approaching the presence of the king, received a salutation which, while it was respectful, betrayed an evident consciousness of guilt. "Blessed be thou of the Lord," said Saul; "I have performed the commandment of the Lord."

The prophet well knew that this was not the case. "What meaneth then," he inquired, "this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?"

Saul endeavored to palliate the offence. "They have brought them from the Amalekites," was his reply; "for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed."

Samuel had a message from the Lord to deliver to the king, to which he requested his attention. Saul expressed his readiness to hear it. "When thou wast little in thy own sight," said the prophet, "wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee king over Israel? And the Lord sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the Lord?"

Saul still persisted in exculpating himself. "Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and

have gone the way which the Lord sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal."

But the divine command did not allow of this. It admitted of no qualification, and ought to have been scrupulously complied with. "Hath the Lord," inquired the prophet, "as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king."

The true service of God is in the heart. The sacrifices of old were acceptable only so far as they were offered up by believing and obedient worshippers. And this is equally true with regard to the forms and ceremonies of religion at the present day. If heartless they are worthless. God is pleased with them just in proportion as they are indicative of a spirit of love to him, and of loyalty to his government, abiding in the breast, a ruling principle there of thought and action. Duty sometimes requires that they should be dispensed with. Our Saviour taught us by his

own example that works of mercy must be performed on the Sabbath-day, and that they are no violations of its sacredness. Saul and the Israelites had an express injunction laid upon them not to spare the domestic animals of the Amalekites. God had wise reasons for giving this injunction. He preferred obedience to his commands far above the costliest sacrifices which could be laid upon his altar. Their presuming to make ready their offerings in the spirit of *rebellion and stubbornness*, as was undoubtedly the case, and to presume in this way to propitiate the divine favor, when they had sinned in so aggravated a manner, afforded only additional evidence of the guilt of the Israelites, and was a great aggravation of it.

Let us beware of cherishing the same spirit, and of vainly hoping to extenuate our failure in duty by the formalities of a heartless and merely outward worship.

CHAPTER XX.

Saul rejected from being king. Samuel slays Agag, and is sent to anoint David.

For a moment, the conscience of Saul seems to have been moved by the rebuke of Samuel. Had his expression of penitence been heartfelt and lasting, what happy results would have followed from it. But we have reason to fear, that it came not from any sincere sorrow for sin ; that it was nothing more than the effect of fear, or of policy ; and that it soon passed away. "I have sinned," he exclaimed ; "for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words : because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. Now, therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord."

"I will not return with thee," replied the prophet ; "for thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel." Saying this, Samuel turned about to go his way, when Saul laid hold of the skirt of his mantle, to detain him, and it rent.

The prophet seized the occasion, to impress the truth he was commissioned to announce the more forcibly upon Saul and those who were present. "The Lord," said he, "hath rent the

kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine, that is better than thou." To this he added, in the most solemn manner, to give assurance to the declaration : " The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent ; for he is not a man, that he should repent."

The king stood reproved before the prophet. His fears of the judgments with which he was thus threatened, seem to have greatly alarmed him. Once more he exclaimed, " I have sinned : yet honor me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord thy God." How entirely was his sorrow of the selfish sort. His own guilt, his disobedience to the divine commands, his pernicious example, these did not seem to humble him, and to draw from him the cries for pardon of a sincere repentance. He felt only for his own safety, and his dignity in the eyes of the people. To have this undervalued, and himself in any degree disgraced by the neglect of Samuel, was what affected him far more than a sense of any injury which he had done to the divine honor, or to the best interests of the nation. His entreaty prevailed. The prophet remained, and Saul engaged in some acts of public religious worship ; though it does not appear that Samuel conducted them, or indeed took any part in them.

At their close, the prophet, undoubtedly by the divine command, directed Agag, the king of the Amalekites, to be brought before him ; being ordered to execute that punishment upon this tyrant which his many cruelties and aggravated sins deserved, and which Saul had neglected to inflict. Agag came, affecting still the air of a monarch, to inspire the awe which he thought should be felt at his presence, and confident that having escaped the vengeance of Saul, the danger of death, and its accompanying horrors, were past. He was greatly mistaken. Samuel stood before him and the people, the minister of divine justice. "As thy sword," said he, addressing Agag, "hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women ;" and proceeding to carry the sentence into execution on the spot, the prophet hewed him in pieces. It was a fearful death, and a striking illustration of the prerogative which God claims to himself. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." All who witnessed the scene, could not but have felt the punishment to be what Agag deserved. The awful judgments of the Almighty had, at length, overtaken him, and his career of sin on earth was closed by this signal display of *retributive justice* which he was doomed to suffer.

Samuel now went to Ramah, and Saul to his residence in Gibeah ; nor did the former ever af-

ter go to see the latter, thus ceasing to give him any external act of respect in his official capacity ; and we are told, in the strong language of Scripture, in this connection, that " the Lord repented that he had made Saul king over Israel."

It seems, however, that the venerable prophet felt deeply for the condition of his countrymen as involved with that of their sovereign. He mourned over the fate of the latter, and dreaded the temporary evils, at least, which must attend the remaining part of his career, before so important a change could take place as the settling of the affairs of the nation under his successor.

Such a successor was soon to appear. He was already appointed in the divine counsel ; and Samuel was directed to carry that counsel into effect. He received a communication from Jehovah in these words : " How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel ? Fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Beth-lehemite : for I have provided me a king among his sons."

The prophet knew the vindictive character of Saul, and was apprehensive for his personal safety on that account. " How can I go," he ventured to reply, " if Saul hear it, he will kill me." He might in this way express a desire to receive some prudential directions how to act in so critical an emergency. God condescended to instruct

him; so that, without any *false* representation on his part, he might yet conceal from the public, for the present, the knowledge of the *main object* of his mission. And no principle in morals can be plainer than this, that we are not under obligation to disclose all our plans, or to tell *the whole truth* at all times; though in every case we are solemnly bound to say nothing but what is true, and consistent with the truth, and to avoid uttering any thing which has a direct tendency to lead the hearer to believe a falsehood. When we are under no obligation to make him acquainted with all the circumstances of the case, and in consequence of what we say, *in strict accordance with truth so far as it goes*, he labors under any mistake, either through his own ignorance or fault, no blame can attach to us on this account. Any other rule of inter-communication with our fellow-men would be attended with palpable and endless evils, so long as caution and concealment of any kind are necessary in this wicked world. In applying this rule, however, we should be sure to do it conscientiously and wisely. For we had better suffer in our own individual interest, when such a sacrifice is necessary, than to subject ourselves to the imputation of uttering a falsehood, and thus injure the great cause of truth and sincerity. In the case of Samuel, too, there was an express, divine direction

how to proceed, which we can have no hope of receiving.

He was ordered to take a heifer with him, and to say that he was coming to Beth-lehem to sacrifice there unto the Lord. To this was added ; " Call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show thee what thou shalt do : and thou shalt anoint unto me him whom I name unto thee." It was truly an occasion when such a solemn act of religious worship was needed. To perform it was clearly *one object* which the prophet had in view in visiting Beth-lehem ; and to state this was giving *one reason* of his going there. He might have *other* reasons, and without any departure from truth forbear to divulge them.

His approach was soon a matter of public notoriety. The elders of the place, we are told, " trembled at his coming." They feared lest he was commissioned to denounce against the city a divine judgment, or that he might bring a message from the Lord which was to impose upon them some fearful responsibility. " Comest thou peaceably ?" said they ; " and he said, Peaceably : I am come to sacrifice unto the Lord : sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice."

Jesse and his sons were then sent for, and directed also to sanctify themselves for the occasion. None were to appear before the Lord in

this act of devotion without the ceremonial ablutions which were required, and especially without that preparation of the heart which could alone render their offerings acceptable.

CHAPTER XXI.

David's parentage. He is anointed by Samuel.

Jesse was the grandson of Ruth, the Moabitess, who came with her mother-in-law, Naomi, to Beth-lehem, and there married Boaz, one of its wealthiest and most respectable inhabitants. Her disinterested devotedness to Naomi, for whose sake she left for ever her own country and friends; her adoption of the Israelitish faith; and her exemplary character for prudence and piety, mark her history, briefly as it is recorded in the sacred Scriptures, with an affecting and instructive interest. That one of her near descendants should be king of Israel, was a distinguished honor to be conferred upon the family of this once poor and unknown woman; a striking illustration of the favor which God, in the course of his provi-

dence, often bestows upon the offspring of such as faithfully consecrate themselves to his service.

Jesse was far advanced in years, and with his eight sons led an agricultural life in the peaceful vales of Beth-lehem. Himself, and seven of them, cheerfully obeyed the summons which they received from Samuel, and came to the sacrifice. The youngest remained behind, probably on account of his being at some distance from home, tending his father's sheep, while it was deemed inconvenient to send for him, as the occasion needed dispatch. Besides, Jesse being made acquainted, as we have reason to believe, with the object which the prophet had in view, may have regarded this son as altogether too young and inexperienced for the elevated station that some one of his older brethren seemed vastly better qualified to fill, and, therefore, considered it useless for him to accompany them.

Eliab, the eldest, was a man of great stature, and of a prepossessing countenance and mien. As soon as Samuel saw him, he was so struck with his commanding aspect, that he said within himself, this must surely be the Lord's anointed, the destined successor of Saul. A divine intimation, however, soon convinced him that his decision was a wrong one. "Look not on his countenance," said the Lord, "or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the

Lord seeth not as man seeth ; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."

Jesse called Abinadab, another of his sons, and probably the next in age, directing him to pass before the prophet. But he also was rejected, as Samuel declared ; having, doubtless, had another Divine intimation to this effect.

The other sons successively appeared ; while each, in his turn, was pronounced by the prophet not to be the individual whom the Lord had chosen. "Are here all thy children ?" inquired Samuel. "There remaineth yet the youngest," replied Jesse, "and, behold, he keepeth the sheep." "Send for him," said Samuel, "for we will not sit down till he come hither." The feast that followed the sacrifice which Samuel had been offering up, and in the religious ceremonies of which Jesse and his sons had participated, was ready ; but so important, in the estimation of the prophet, was the accomplishment of his divine mission, that until this was effected, the social festivity which usually took place on such occasions must be suspended.

The youngest son of Jesse was sent for, and soon arrived. He was yet in the freshness of youthful health, and of a most prepossessing appearance ; "ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to." How great

must have been his surprise, and that of his father and elder brethren, at what immediately happened. Samuel, under the Divine direction, anointed him as the successor of the king of Israel; and "from that day forward," we are told, "the Spirit of the Lord came upon David," infusing into his soul those peculiar qualifications which he would need in the elevated station that he was now destined to fill.

After the feast, Jesse and his sons taking an affectionate leave of the venerable prophet of the Lord, who, doubtless, bestowed upon them his parting blessing, returned home. There, for the present, we leave them, with David, *the anointed one*, (whose future history we hope yet to pursue,) following still their quiet and happy occupations—happy, indeed, in their delightful retirement, if the love of God and of each other reigned within their breasts. But, alas! we have reason to fear, as we shall hereafter see, that the spirit of envy soon began to interrupt their domestic peace. The elevation of their youngest brother, himself yet a mere youth, over his brethren, so much his superiors, as they supposed, in experience, as well as age, was an indignity which Eliab, the eldest, and probably some of the others, could not easily brook. Sad degeneracy of our common nature! How selfish and sinful have been its manifestations, till renewed

by divine grace, in all ages, and under every variety of condition! The Lord himself, through the instrumentality of his own prophet, had conferred the highest temporal honor upon the son of Jesse, and in this way upon the family itself. What future scenes of rightful and honorable advancement might not thus open before them, and of distinguished usefulness in the service of their country and their God. What cause of gratitude to the divine Author of such blessings, and of increased attachment to the individual chosen from among them, to be the providential source of their new hopes with regard to the coming destiny of themselves and their families. Such were the views they should have entertained, and cherished the corresponding sentiments in their breasts. Let us pray and strive, that, under all the various circumstances of life in which we may be placed, we may be delivered from *the blighting curse of a repining, envious heart.*

The sacred narrative affords us no more particulars of the life of Samuel for a few years afterwards, when we hear of him at Ramah, the usual place of his residence. David had fled thither to seek his counsel and protection under the persecution which he was suffering from the malignant enmity of Saul. They retired to Naioth, a town not far distant, where, it is supposed, was a school of the prophets under the direction of

Samuel, and took up their abode there. But the prophet was soon obliged to advise David to seek another place of security ; Saul himself coming to Naoth in pursuit of his victim.

Soon after this Samuel died, having reached the advanced age of nearly a hundred years ; and "all the Israelites," we are told, "were gathered together, and lamented him, and buried him in his house at Ramah," that is, as we have reason to believe this expression intends, in the sepulchre he had prepared for his burial, near his dwelling, and probably in the garden attached to it.

It is supposed that he governed Israel, as a judge, for the space of about twenty years, till Saul was placed on the throne as the first monarch, and that he died between thirty and forty years afterwards. That such *vast multitudes* from every part of the nation assembled at Ramah, to pay the last sad offices of respect to the remains of the departed prophet, affords abundant evidence of the affectionate and deep veneration which his countrymen of all ages and conditions cherished towards him.

Before noticing some of the prominent traits of his character, which it is proposed to do in the ensuing chapter, it ought to be mentioned that a few short particulars concerning Samuel, are recorded in the book of Chronicles that have not been alluded to in the preceding history. He

took a part with David in appointing to their office, and establishing in it, the keepers of the gates of the tabernacle. He dedicated to the service of the sanctuary certain spoils which belonged to him, that were taken in battle from the enemies of the Israelites ; and he is said, in conjunction with the prophets Nathan and Gad, to have written the history of David—such parts of it, of course, as embraced those events which took place before his death.

CHAPTER XXII.

Character of Samuel.

In contemplating the character of Samuel, his *early piety* furnishes one of its most striking traits. Dedicated by his parents, while yet an infant, to the peculiar service of God, he confirmed this dedication by his own acts at a very tender age. Cheerfully obedient to the high priest Eli, under whose care he was placed, he employed his growing capacities of body and of mind in the discharge of those duties in the sanctuary that were assigned him.

How grateful is the sight of this beauty of holiness in the bud of being. It meets with the peculiar favor of God. He highly honored and blessed the youthful Samuel on this account; while it tended, under the influence of Divine grace, as he advanced in years, to the forming of his whole excellent character.

Dear children and youth, thus consecrate yourselves to God and his service. Under his care and guidance you will be safe. Beginning now a life of humble and devoted piety, you may expect, as was the case with Samuel, to advance from one degree of grace and of usefulness to another, till, ripened for heaven, you are called thither to rest from your labors.

In the eleventh chapter of Paul's epistle to the Hebrews, Samuel is classed among those whom the apostle mentions as so highly distinguished for their *faith*, and for the wonders which it enabled them to accomplish. An implicit and unwavering confidence in God, was the life-giving principle that imparted moral health, vigor, and beauty to the character of this illustrious man. *He believed all that God told him.* He believed it *practically*; in the conscience, in the heart, in all the desires and purposes of his soul. It gave reality and power to Divine truth. It brought him under its constant and mighty influence. It made the unseen future substantial. It awakene .

the fear of displeasing God. It kindled up the cheering hope of securing his continued favor, and of enjoying it for ever. It inspired the love of *the right*, with the inflexible practice of it; because he *believed* that God was a God of righteousness and would cause it eventually to triumph. It led him to *live to do good*; because he *believed* that God was a being of infinite benevolence and would give success, in his own time and way, to all such efforts in his service. It brought him daily to the mercy-seat in humble and devout *prayer*, both for himself and the people; because he *believed* that he addressed a prayer-hearing God, who would be faithful to his promises, and shed down upon those who call upon him in spirit and in truth the blessings which they need.

This *faith* armed Samuel with that *moral courage* for which he was conspicuous amid scenes that tested it so frequently and severely. In performing his duty he feared not man. He *believed* that he acted with the approbation, and under the protection of that God who is a shield of security to all who put their trust in him. Whatever he may permit to happen to their *bodies*, the temporary tabernacles which they inhabit,—their *souls*,—*themselves* in the truest and highest sense, —shall be unhurt. Hence we see how boldly he reproved Saul and the Israelites, when his duty

required it; how he reformed abuses; maintained the honor of the divine law; administered justice with inflexible integrity; and acted, both while he was the chief magistrate of the nation, and afterwards in all the relations of life, with such unflinching uprightness as to command universal approbation and respect. No enemy, if indeed he had one, dared to reproach him. We have noticed the appeal which he made to his countrymen, when he challenged them to witness against him. Not a complaint, or even insinuation was heard. He stood before the assembled multitude, unimpeachable in the purity and rectitude of his whole course of conduct.

Samuel died as he lived, a faithful and obedient servant of the Lord; one of the most striking examples of *the power of religion upon the heart and life*; and one which the writer earnestly prays his youthful readers, under the blessing of God, may have both the desire and the ability to imitate.

THE END.

